Flu Prevention

FAST FACTS DEC. 2018

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Spanish Flu (formally known as the 1918 flu pandemic) that killed an estimated 50 million people worldwide.

As winter approaches, the U.S. is entering peak flu season. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), thousands of people are hospitalized and die from flu-related illnesses each year. The flu is also responsible for almost 17 million missed workdays.

Influenza, or the flu, is defined as a contagious respiratory illness caused by flu viruses. While most people who get the flu will recover relatively quickly, some may develop complications that can be life-threatening. Individuals who are at high-risk for complications include people over 65 years old, children younger than 5 years old, pregnant women, and people with chronic medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, or heart disease.

PREVENTION

All employees should follow basic hygiene practices to prevent illness. Many infectious diseases can be spread by hands to the nose or eyes, where they can enter the body. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Hand washing is the most effective way to reduce exposure to germs. Hand sanitizers can be used when soap is unavailable. The CDC recommends that all individuals get the flu vaccination and encourages employers to host flu vaccination clinics in the workplace. All individuals should practice healthy habits (i.e. get plenty of sleep, manage stress and eat nutritious foods) to reduce their risk of becoming ill.

COMMON FLU SYMPTOMS:

- Fever or chills;
- Cough;
- Sore throat;
- Runny nose;
- Muscle, head or body aches;
- Fatigue; or
- Vomiting and diarrhea.

Employers can establish a variety of internal policies and practices to protect employees and constituents, including:

• Encouraging flu shots.
• Providing hand sanitizer dispensers.
• Establishing work policies or physical barriers that minimize contact between employees and the public.
• Using personal protective equipment such as gloves, face shields, or surgical masks, if appropriate.

PANDEMIC FLU

An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges globally with little or no immunity in the human population. A pandemic flu outbreak can impact employee and workplace operations. Planning for this type of non-traditional emergency is an important part of ensuring the health and safety of employees and continuity of operations in the event of an outbreak.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) provides pandemic plan preparation guidance. The information from the guidance provided below can be useful for addressing a pandemic flu event or interruptions to normal operations due to regular seasonal flu outbreaks.

STEP 1 – KNOW YOUR RISK

- Very High Exposure Risk – High potential of exposure to high concentrations of sources of pandemic influenza during specific medical or laboratory procedures.
- High Exposure Risk – High potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of virus.
- Medium Exposure Risk – Frequent contact to known or suspected sources of virus (coworkers, general public, outpatients, school children, etc.)
- Low Exposure Risk – Minimal contact with people known to be infected with virus or public.

STEP 2 – DEVELOP A PLAN

- Identify essential functions and personnel.
- Anticipate disruption in daily operations.
- Prepare succession strategy in case of absenteeism. Train more than one employee on each job function.
- Evaluate computer/server requirements and upkeep to support teleworking.
- Ensure the safety and health of employees at work.
- Plan for payroll, benefit and other human resource functions.
- Prepare for interrupted supply delivery.

STEP 3 – SUSTAIN THE WORKPLACE DURING AN OUTBREAK

- Communicate with appropriate organizations (CDC, HHS, and legislative branch leadership) regarding the status of the pandemic.
- Consider permitting/ encouraging telecommuting.
- Ensure that ill employees have access to care.
- Provide disinfectant, cleaning materials, soap, alcohol-based hand rubs and disposable wipes.
- Routinely clean objects and surfaces (i.e. conference room tables, keyboards, doorknobs, phones) to remove germs.

WHAT IF AN EMPLOYEE IS SICK?

Employees should not come to work if they are sick. If they do come to work, they should be sent home. If an employee becomes ill at work, they should do the following:

- Cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or hands when coughing or sneezing;
- Put used tissue in a wastebasket;
- Clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand gel immediately after coughing or sneezing;
- Avoid close contact with coworkers;
- Clean and disinfect heavily used spaces and frequently touched surfaces.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- cdcfoundation.org/businesspulse/flu-prevention-resources
- osha.gov/Publications/influenza_pandemic.html
- cdc.gov/flu/index.htm