



# ***The Safety Frontline***

## **Information on the H1N1 Influenza Outbreak: Recommendations from JC Safety & Environmental, Inc.**

**Friday May 1, 2009**

The current global outbreak of H1N1 Influenza has been a topic of ever increasing concern to many Americans in the past few weeks. The situation is rapidly evolving and creating anxious moments for many. Staff at JC Safety & Environmental, Inc. have been monitoring the situation very carefully and would like to take this opportunity to make a few recommendations to our clients and readers of our E-Newsletter.

While we think the situation is cause for serious concern, we do not see the need for alarm and are suggesting some prudent practices that will assist you and your employees as you navigate current events and prepare as best as possible for a potentially worsening situation. Here's our best advice to you right now:

- Try to stay current with the facts of the situation and remember things are changing very rapidly. Coverage from the national news media may seem overwhelming at times and, at other times, unnecessarily alarming. However, we have found several websites that provide basic factual information and are using them to stay on top of the situation. By far, we like the CDC website the best – [www.cdc.gov/swineflu/](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/). It is updated several times a day and has numerous resources and documents that we find extremely readable. We also suggest the World Health Organization's site found at [www.who.int/](http://www.who.int/) You could also try your local Public Health Department, State Public Health agency or your Workers Compensation Physician's Panel.
- The members of your organization need accurate information. Some of it may sound frightening, but incorrect information or lack of any information leads to speculation and rumor. It also makes people feel out of control and creates more anxiety than is warranted. Take some time to schedule brief meetings with your work force to discuss the current situation and remind them of the things they can do to control the spread of the virus. If face to face meetings are not possible, use some other form of communication, such as email or letters to home addresses. And keep the information flowing. You may need to provide an update every few days or even every day.
- Appoint someone in your organization to be the "point person" who can spend some time each day staying on top of the situation, know how events apply to you, and be available to provide information and research questions. They don't have to be an authority on flu outbreaks, just someone who can be relied upon to stay on top of current developments and transmit the information as needed.

- The World Health Organization has raised the worldwide pandemic alert level to Phase 5. A Phase 5 alert is a “strong signal that a pandemic is imminent and that the time to finalize the organization, communication, and implementation of the planned mitigation measures is short.” While no one knows for sure whether this event will turn into a pandemic and if so, how severe it will be, we believe it is better to prepare right now and begin to act as if it will happen, rather than wait any longer and get caught with little or no time. Remember that we have gone from a Phase 3 alert to a Phase 5 in just three days and Phase 6 means that a pandemic is underway.

We hope that your organization has already developed a Pandemic Preparedness Plan, either as a stand alone document or as part of your overall Business Continuity Plan, but we also know that many of you have not done so. If that is the case for your organization, it is probably too late to start from scratch now, however, we do suggest that you consider convening a small working group immediately and begin to review the available planning resources and evaluate some concrete steps you can implement quickly, short of a full-blown plan. Depending upon your situation, it may not take much time to put together some effective strategies and activities. If the pandemic doesn’t materialize or if it ends up being fairly minor in this country, your time will not have been wasted as you can use the work of the group to prepare a more comprehensive Plan for the future. Remember, nearly every expert in the field of global epidemiology assures us that the issue isn’t whether or not we will have another pandemic, but when. And many think we are way overdue.

We suggest the following resources to get your started:

- NFPA 1600 – Standard on Disaster/Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs. Unlike most NFPA Standards, this one is available to download for free at <http://www.nfpa.org/assets/files/pdf/nfpa1600.pdf>
- OSHA’s Guidance on Preparing the Workplace for an Influenza Pandemic [http://www.osha.gov/Publications/influenza\\_pandemic.html](http://www.osha.gov/Publications/influenza_pandemic.html)

The above recommendations are not complicated and can be implemented easily without any additional outside help. However, as always, we are ready to assist you more directly if you feel you need that level. Our staff has done numerous presentations on pandemic preparedness and have written or helped to write various types of emergency response plans over the years. We would love to share what we know with you. Please call us at 412.414.4769 or send an email to [info@jcsafety.com](mailto:info@jcsafety.com).

In addition, I will be presenting twice on the topic of Risk/Crisis Communications at national events in the near future – at the AIHce Conference in Toronto on Monday June 1<sup>st</sup> and at the ASSE Conference in San Antonio on Tuesday June 30<sup>th</sup>. I promise to provide up to date information on the outbreak and targeted suggestions for how to deal with the situation as it exists at the time. Please join me if you are planing to attend either of the conferences.

*Keep it Safe!*  
*Pam Ferrante, CSP, CHMM*  
*President*