

H1N1 Flu Pandemic and the Workplace

Employers and Employees need to be aware of the significant risks associated with a potential H1N1 Flu Pandemic. Pandemics have huge effects on many parts of society, including in the workplace. This fact sheet provides information about dealing with a pandemic in the workplace.

What is H1N1 Flu?

H1N1 is a strain of the influenza virus. It causes a respiratory illness with symptoms similar to those of the seasonal flu.

How will H1N1 affect workplaces?

It is unclear at this time how severe an H1N1 Pandemic may be. All Manitobans are encouraged to use the precautions outlined by Manitoba Health and Health Canada to help slow the spread of the virus.

Manitoba businesses are encouraged to have an emergency preparedness plan in place to deal with the possible affects. Businesses can find a guide on creating a plan at www.manitoba.ca/influenza/pandemic.

There could be a lot of employees who will not be able to attend work because of the flu. Employers should be aware of this fact and be making plans to deal with the situation.

How can we prevent the spread of H1N1 Flu in the workplace?

To help prevent the spread of the flu:

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water. Or use hand sanitizer when you cannot use soap and water.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Cough into your sleeve or a tissue, not into your hands or the air. Wash your hands afterwards.
- Stand or sit further away from people.
- Stay at home if you are sick.

Employers have a responsibility to inform their workers of these measures and ensure they are followed.

Employers are encouraged to be reasonable during this critical time. Since there will be an increase in demand for healthcare services, it may not be reasonable to require doctors notes for absences due to the flu. Workers should judge their need to see a doctor based on their symptoms and the suggestions of Manitoba Health or Health Canada.

More information on ways employers and employees can fight the spread of the flu can be found at

www.fightflu.ca a website of the Public Health Agency of Canada and at the Province of Manitoba Website www.manitoba.ca/flu

Are there workplace safety issues regarding the H1N1 Flu Pandemic?

Yes, employers and employees have rights and responsibilities in relation to workplace safety and health. To find more information regarding workplace safety and the flu see the Worksafe Bulletin at:

http://safemanitoba.com/uploads/bulletins/bltn_262_sept_17_2009.pdf

or visit the Workplace Safety and Health Division website at: www.safemanitoba.com

Does the Employment Standards Code apply during an H1N1 flu pandemic?

Yes, the *Employment Standards Code* does apply during pandemics. Employers and employees are encouraged to do whatever they can to prevent the spread of the flu. Employers and employees should expect workplaces to be short staffed and be flexible in dealing with situations that arise.

Employers and employees with specific questions should contact Employment Standards at 945-3352 or 1-800-821-4307 to discuss the issues.

For more information contact Employment Standards:

Phone: 204-945-3352; or toll free in Canada 1-800-821-4307

Fax: 204-948-3046

E-mail: employmentstandards@gov.mb.ca

Website: www.manitoba.ca/labour/standards

This is a general overview and the information used is subject to change. For detailed information, please refer to current legislation including *The Employment Standards Code* and *The Worker Recruitment and Protection Act*, or contact Employment Standards to ask for advice.

Date Published: February 24, 2012