

# H1N1 (swine flu) Virus

## Frequently Asked Questions for Employment and the Workplace

Answers are prepared specifically for Multnomah County employees.  
Other government jurisdictions and organizations may provide different guidance based on their policies, labor agreements or other regulations.

Please check back regularly  
FAQs updated as new or revised guidance becomes available  
Information Updated: September 2, 2009

Contact your department HR Unit for further information or clarification

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### Hot Topics:

#### If I get a flu-like illness - how long should I stay home and away from others?

**Answer:** For all employees except health care workers, CDC recommends staying at home and away from others 24 hours *after* you no longer have a fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius) or signs of a fever (have chills, feel very warm, have a flushed appearance, or are sweating). This should be determined without the use of fever-reducing medications (any medicine that contains ibuprofen or acetaminophen). This means a 3-5 day exclusion from work for most people. Health care workers should be off work for 7 days after becoming ill (or 24 hours after resolution of fever - whichever is longer).

*If you are sick and are at higher risk for complications from flu because of a chronic health condition or concerned about your illness, call your health care provider for advice.*

#### What happens if I'm out of sick leave hours and I have a flu-like illness?

**Answer:** Some employees may run out of sick leave during a severe outbreak of H1N1 virus or flu-like illness. Use of vacation leave, compensatory time or saved holidays may be used. If all paid leave is exhausted, leave without pay is the next step.

**County management is evaluating alternative leave rules. Other options may be provided to employees who don't have paid leave time when they have a flu-like illness. Employees will be notified immediately of any policy changes.**

#### If I'm home sick for more than 3 days with a flu-like illness, do I need to get a doctor's note?

**Answer:** There is no change in County policy at this time.

- Any absence of more than 3 days for illness or injury may require a doctor's note depending on your department's current policy and practice.
- At this time, medical certification requirements for a FMLA or OFLA qualifying event do not change.
- An employee who is under disciplinary or corrective action for attendance issues that includes a requirement to provide a medical statement for unscheduled absences will still be required to provide the required statement, including for absences due to flu-like illnesses.
- Check with your department HR unit for guidance if you are uncertain what to do for your individual situation.

During a severe flu outbreak, the CDC advises employers not to require a doctor's note for workers who are ill with flu-like illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as doctor's offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and may not be able to provide such documentation in a timely way. The County is working closely with local Public Health authorities, and will have the most up-to-date information regarding the severity of flu outbreak in the community. Employees will be notified of any change in policy.

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### Update Highlights:

No new updates

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## GENERAL INFORMATION

### 8 Ways You Can Stay Healthy at Work

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business/toolkit/waysyoucanstayhealthy.htm>

### What are Symptoms of H1N1?

#### How do I know if someone has 2009 H1N1 flu or seasonal flu?

It is very hard to tell if someone has 2009 H1N1 flu or seasonal flu. CDC does not recommend routine laboratory tests. Anyone who has the symptoms of flu-like illness should stay home and not go to work. Symptoms of flu include fever or chills and cough or sore throat. In addition, symptoms of flu can include runny nose, body aches, headache, tiredness, diarrhea, or vomiting.

#### How do I recognize a fever or signs of a fever?

A fever is a temperature taken with a thermometer that is equal to or greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius). If a sick employee's temperature cannot be taken, look for these possible signs of fever: if he or she feels very warm, has a flushed appearance, or is sweating or shivering. **Keeping people with a fever at home may reduce the number of people who get infected with the flu virus.**

### What About People at Higher Risk for Complications?

About 70 percent of people who have been hospitalized with H1N1 virus have had medical conditions previously recognized as placing people at "high risk" of serious seasonal flu-related complications. The CDC reports a person who is at high-risk for complications of novel influenza (H1N1) virus infection is defined as the same for seasonal influenza at this time. As more epidemiologic and clinical data become available, these risk groups might be revised. High-risk groups include: children younger than 5 years old. Adults 65 years of age and older. Persons with the following conditions: chronic pulmonary (including asthma), cardiovascular (except hypertension), renal, hepatic, hematological (including sickle cell disease), neurologic, neuromuscular, or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus); immunosuppression, including that caused by medications or by HIV; pregnant women; persons younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy; residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities.

**What is Social Distancing?** The H1N1 pandemic appears to be mild in that most people who get sick will get better at home without medical attention. However, if the H1N1 pandemic becomes more severe, public health officials may recommend a variety of methods for increasing the physical distance between people to reduce the spread of disease. Methods can include canceling large community gatherings, canceling large business-related meetings, spacing workers farther apart in the workplace, canceling non-essential travel, and potentially school dismissal and child care program closure.

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** CDC is the primary Federal public health authority and is the main source for guidance regarding H1N1 flu.

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## STAY HOME WHEN SICK

### Q1: If I get a flu-like illness - how long should I stay home and away from others?

**Answer:** For all employees except health care workers, CDC recommends staying at home and away from others 24 hours *after* you no longer have a fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius) or signs of a fever (have chills, feel very warm, have a flushed appearance, or are sweating). This should be determined without the use of fever-reducing medications (any medicine that contains ibuprofen or acetaminophen). Practically, this will mean a 3-5 day exclusion from work for most people. Health care workers should be off work for 7 days after becoming ill - or 24 hours after resolution of fever - whichever is longer.

*If you are sick and are at higher risk for complications from flu because of a chronic health condition or concerned about your illness, call your health care provider for advice.*

## SICK LEAVE

**Q2: Can I use paid sick leave for:**

**A. H1N1 or flu-like illness?**

**Answer:** Yes, probationary and regular employees can use paid sick leave when off work with a flu-like illness.

**B. I've been exposed to a family or household member with flu-like illness?**

**Answer:** No, exposure is not considered an illness. CDC advises that employees who are well but who have an ill family member at home with a flu-like illness can go to work as usual. However, these employees should monitor their health every day, and notify their supervisor and stay home if they become ill.

**C. Care for a family member with flu-like illness?**

**Answer:** Yes, caring for children or family members (as defined by FMLA or OFLA) with flu-like illness is an appropriate use of paid sick leave.

**Q3: What happens if I'm out of sick leave hours and I have a flu-like illness?**

**Answer:** Some employees may run out of sick leave during a severe outbreak of H1N1 virus or flu-like illness. Use of vacation leave, compensatory time or saved holidays may be used. If all paid leave is exhausted, leave without pay is the next step.

**County management is evaluating alternative leave rules. Other leave options may be provided to employees who don't have paid leave time when they have a flu-like illness. Employees will be notified immediately of any policy changes.**

**Q4: My aunt is very sick with the flu and I am the only person available to take care of her. May I use sick leave?**

**Answer:** Sick leave is allowable for members of employee's immediate household; employee's spouse, parents or children as defined by FMLA; parents-in-law as defined by OFLA; employee's domestic partner designated in Affidavit submitted to Employee Benefits and the children and parents of such domestic partner. If aunt is a member of the employee's household (sharing a residence), use of sick leave is allowable. If aunt (**or another person**) is not a member of employee's household, time to care for that person is considered vacation or other non-sick time leave. Check with your department HR unit if you are uncertain what to do for your individual situation.

**Q5: If I'm home sick for more than 3 days with a flu-like illness, do I need to get a doctor's note to substantiate my illness?**

**Answer:** There is no change in County policy at this time.

- Any absence of more than 3 days for illness or injury may require a doctor's note depending on your department's current policy and practice.
- At this time, medical certification requirements for a FMLA or OFLA qualifying event do not change.
- An employee who is under disciplinary or corrective action for attendance issues that includes a requirement to provide a medical statement for unscheduled absences will still be required to provide the required statement, including for absences due to flu-like illnesses.
- Check with your department HR unit for guidance if you are uncertain what to do for your individual situation.

During a severe flu outbreak, the CDC advises employers not to require a doctor's note for workers who are ill with flu-like illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as doctor's offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and may not be able to provide such documentation in a timely way. The County is working closely with local Public Health authorities, and will have the most up-to-date information regarding the severity of flu outbreak in the community. Employees will be notified of any change in policy.

**Q6: Do I code my timesheet differently for H1N1 sick leave from regular sick leave coding?**

**Answer:** No, employees with flu-like illness code their leave the same as for any type of illness.

## SENDING SICK EMPLOYEES HOME

**Q7: If an employee appears to have symptoms of a flu-like illness (see above info on Symptoms under General Information) may a supervisor send him/her home? If so, how is the sick time coded?**

**Answer:** For safety reasons to reduce the spread of infection to other employees or customers, a supervisor may encourage an employee who shows signs of flu-like symptoms to go home and use sick or other leave time.

If an employee shows signs of flu-like symptoms and refuses to go home, and the supervisor believes it is in the best interests of the workplace and the safety of other employees and customers, the supervisor may require the employee to leave the workplace.

- If the supervisor believes the employee meets the definition for sick leave, as outlined in the appropriate bargaining agreement or personnel rules, then time may be charged to the employee's sick leave.
- If the supervisor is uncertain of the available objective evidence to meet the definition of sick leave, then with approval from the department HR manager, time is coded as paid administrative leave and does not count against the employee's leave banks.

**Q8: What if I come to work and then become sick and too ill to drive or take a bus home?**

**Answer:** Sick employees who have a difficult time arranging a ride home are encouraged to talk with their supervisor or department HR representative for assistance. It's important that all employees have emergency contacts listed with the County in case they need assistance. Update your emergency contact info now using the online Personal Information Form (PIF) via the MINT at [Personal Information Form](#)

## OTHER LEAVE TIME INFO

**Q9: I'm afraid of catching a flu-like illness and don't want to come to work, what are my leave options?**

**Answer:** All employees are expected to report to work as scheduled unless they have an approved leave. Employees who refuse to come to work or perform their assigned job duties may be disciplined.

Healthy employees afraid of catching the flu, can check with their supervisor to request leave time from work. In times of high-absenteeism, leave requests may not be granted. Leave requests from employees designated as essential workers during a pandemic may not be approved. Employees are encouraged to manage leave time requests so not to be without paid leave in event of a future sick leave need.

Employees at higher risk for complications from the flu (see above info under General Information) are encouraged to contact their health care provider at the first signs of illness for advice. Employees at higher risk for complications, especially those in positions designated as essential workers during a pandemic, are encouraged to contact their department HR staff to confidentially discuss leave, reassignment or accommodation options based on a qualifying medical condition.

**Q10: Can I get time off work to care for my child if schools or daycare centers close due to a severe flu outbreak?**

**Answer:** School districts in conjunction with local Public Health authorities determine closure of schools and childcare facilities. Individual school buildings or entire school districts and childcare centers may close to prevent the spread of infection in a severe pandemic. These closures may occur without much notice. Employees are encouraged to pre-plan as much as possible for care of children in the event of school or childcare closures. This is especially important for employees in positions designated as essential workers during a pandemic. Make this a part of your family emergency plan so all family members know what to do. Paid or unpaid sick leave options are appropriate for care of sick children. Paid or unpaid vacation or other non-sick time leave options are appropriate for care of healthy children. Learn more about pandemic flu and create an emergency plan for you and your family at <http://www.flu.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/acd/flu/preparing.pdf>

**Q11: Is the Voluntary Furlough program for Local 88 employees still available?**

**Answer:** Yes, approvals of all voluntary furlough requests are determined in accordance with department procedure. A voluntary furlough allows employees to either reduce their schedules and/or take leave without pay, for a period up to 29 consecutive days. For more info go to <http://mints.co.multnomah.or.us/jsp/MINT/EntryPoint?ch=739d911dff0d010VgnVCM1000003bc614acRCRD>

## **BUSINESS CONTINUITY OPTIONS TO RESPOND TO A SEVERE FLU OUTBREAK**

**Q12: I am really worried my whole work-life will change if there is a severe outbreak of H1N1 virus or flu-like illness.**

**Answer:** The County does not want to penalize an employee for being a responsible worker. And, recognizes that flexible leave options, planned time off of work, having a predictable schedule and familiar work location and assignment are important factors to reduce stress and promote a healthy lifestyle that supports employee performance, resiliency and well-being.

At the same time, the community depends on the County to continue operating and deliver services to the public, especially during times of emergency, such as a severe flu outbreak. How long a severe outbreak can last is uncertain; it may come and go in waves.

**During a severe outbreak of influenza, the County may use a variety of business continuity options to deliver County services to customers, respond to a high rate of absenteeism, and for safety reasons to reduce the spread of infection.** We have not previously faced this type or level of potential emergency and so there is much we don't know until a severe outbreak occurs.

**Some business continuity options described below are possible, but may not be necessary, or used for only a specified length of time. Decisions for business continuity options will be guided by the department and its essential work functions; the level of employee absenteeism; the level of flu outbreak in the community; and advice from Public Health authorities.**

**Q13: During a severe outbreak of H1N1 virus or flu-like illness, can my supervisor cancel my already approved leave? Will I be forced to forfeit my saved holidays if I don't use them before the end of the fiscal year (June 30, 2010)?**

**Answer:** During a severe flu outbreak, the County may rescind or adjust vacation or leave schedules to continue County operations and provide services to customers. Employees designated as essential workers during a pandemic are encouraged to communicate regularly with supervisors regarding status of leave time or vacation schedules. Both employees and supervisors are expected to act in good faith to coordinate use of saved holidays to minimize the potential of forfeiture. Check with your department HR unit for assistance if you are uncertain what to do for your individual situation.

**Q14: During a severe flu outbreak, can the County:**

- **Change my regular work hours and/or day off?**
- **Change my current 4-10 or 9-80 schedule?**
- **Require an alternative work schedule, such as flex-time or new shifts?**
- **Require I work from a different location?**
- **Require I perform work outside of my current job description?**

**Answer:** A severe outbreak of influenza does not automatically mean a change to work schedules, locations or assignments. Not all business continuity options are viable in all work areas. As outlined in labor agreements or personnel rules, the County may consider business continuity options to continue County services to customers, respond to a high rate of absenteeism, and for safety reasons to reduce the spread of infection.

*Work Schedules:* The County currently supports a large number and variety of alternative work schedules. During a severe flu outbreak, management determines when adjustments to work schedules, either short or longer-term, may be required to meet a department's operational needs. Additionally, one way to stay healthy in a severe flu outbreak is minimum contact with others. Staggered shifts and days off are methods to minimize contact between employees and control the spread of infection.

*Work Location:* During a severe flu outbreak, maintaining service to customers, responding to high absenteeism, and reducing the spread of infection may drive work location changes. Not all work duties can be performed at an alternative location. Employees from one site may be needed to keep another site open to serve the public. In times of extreme absenteeism, some work sites may be temporarily closed and employees consolidated in remaining locations. Mileage reimbursement as outlined in labor agreements or personnel rules still apply.

*Work Assignment:* Managers have the right to assign work duties. In times of a severe flu outbreak, this may mean requiring employees to work outside their current job description in short-term or temporary work assignments to provide coverage or support to essential function areas. Work-out-of-class rules still apply in these situations.

**Q15: What are the rules about the number of overtime hours a supervisor may require me to work?**

**Answer:** During a severe flu outbreak, an employee may be required to work overtime to provide coverage to continue County services to customers, especially during high absenteeism. No statutory/regulatory or labor contract limitations exist on the number of overtime hours an employee may work. Supervisors in areas that do not typically require overtime are strongly encouraged to contact your department management and/or HR unit to discuss options for work coverage and guidance on overtime use. Working long hours may become a safety issue. Employees and supervisors are encouraged to consult with your department HR unit or Risk Management on all safety issues.

**Q16: Why doesn't everyone just work from home to avoid getting sick?**

**Answer:** Telecommuting is a potential business continuity option. Most County jobs cannot be performed from home. Remote access into County systems such as SAP is limited. All departments will prioritize remote access based on essential work functions. Telecommuting policies and work rules still apply. Approval of all telecommuting requests are determined by the supervisor. Approval to telecommute during a severe flu outbreak does not necessarily mean long-term approval.

## **ESSENTIAL WORKER DURING A PANDEMIC**

**Q17: How do I know if my position is designated as an essential worker during a pandemic?**

**Answer:** Each department has a procedure for identifying and informing employees who are required to report regardless of the closure or curtailment of County operations. Essential workers should know their status prior to an event. Check with your supervisor or department HR unit if you are uncertain of your status.

**Q18: What does it mean to be designated as an essential worker?**

**Answer:** Essential workers are required to report for duty on time, and remain at work until the end of their scheduled shift.

**Q19: What happens if I am designated as an essential worker, but I do not come to work during a severe pandemic event?**

**Answer:** Essential workers who do not report and have an unplanned absence, may be asked to provide verification to explain reason for not reporting and could be subject to discipline.

**Q20: Can essential workers be assigned duties outside of their normal responsibilities?**

**Answer:** Yes, essential workers, as well as other employees, can be assigned other duties and/or directed to report to a different site.

**Q21: Can essential workers work from home?**

**Answer:** Yes, with their supervisor's permission and if their essential duties can be performed from home.

## **ACTIONS TO STAY HEALTHY**

**Q22: What can I do to avoid getting a flu-like illness?**

*Cover your cough and sneezes* – cough and sneeze into your elbow. Use tissues only once.

*Wash your hands frequently* – wash with soap and water for 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Be sure to wash your hands after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.

*Avoid touching your face* – germs are easily spread if you pick up the virus on your hands and then touch your nose, mouth and eyes.

*Stay home if you are sick* – especially if you have a fever - don't spread infection.

*Get the seasonal flu vaccine as soon as it becomes available* – if you become run down by the seasonal flu, your body will not be capable of fighting off the H1N1 virus. Make sure you stay current with recommended vaccinations. Ask your healthcare provider about the H1N1 vaccine as it is made available.

*Maintain a healthy lifestyle* – get enough sleep, eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly.

**Q23: I feel surrounded by germs! Can the flu virus live on surfaces, such as computer keyboards?**

**Answer:** The CDC advises the flu virus can live on hard surface objects up to 8 hours. Flu viruses may be spread when a person touches a hard surface (such as a desk or doorknob) or an object (such as a keyboard or pen) where the virus has landed and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Routine cleaning of surfaces will help stop the virus from spreading in this way. Routinely clean surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact with cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas. Additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is not recommended.

Cleaning products that are registered by the EPA to disinfect hard, non-porous surfaces that may be contaminated with 2009-H1N1 flu include many commonly found household brands.

List of more than 500 products at <http://www.epa.gov/oppad001/influenza-disinfectants.html>

**Q24: Will a face mask or respirator keep me from getting a flu-like illness?**

**Answer:** The CDC advises that the use of N95 respirators or face masks are generally not recommended for workers in non-health care work settings for general work activities. Healthcare workers with patient contact for health care purposes follow the Health Department respirator and facemask protocol. Healthcare workers check with your supervisor for more information.

CDC also advises that if you are already sick with a flu-like illness to stay home. But, if you must leave your home for medical care, wearing a facemask may reduce the spray of cough or sneeze droplets from you to others. It is not recommended to wear a facemask for long periods of time.

**Q25: Is there an H1N1 flu vaccine? When is it available?**

**Answer:** The 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine will be available approximately mid-October. CDC does not anticipate a shortage of the vaccine, but initial quantities may be limited.

As of August 28, 2009, CDC prioritized the following groups to receive the vaccine before others: pregnant women, people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age, health care and emergency medical services personnel with direct patient contact, persons between the ages of 6 months and 24 years old, and people 25 through 64 years of age who are at higher risk for H1N1 flu because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems.

Vaccine will become available for other groups once these target populations are vaccinated. Similar to seasonal flu vaccines, H1N1 vaccination sites will be available at healthcare offices, pharmacies, schools and other locations. Contact your healthcare provider to find out where to get a vaccine or if you have questions regarding your individual situation.

Anyone previously vaccinated against the 1976 swine flu is unlikely to be fully protected from the 2009 H1N1 flu. The strains are different enough that employees should still get the 2009 H1N1 vaccine when available.