



# Maricopa County

## Department of Public Health

August 20, 2009

Dear business owner or manager:

The second wave of the influenza pandemic should soon be upon us. So far, the virus remains similar in severity to regular flu (although a disproportionate share of those seriously ill are children and young adults). Stay tuned, however, as the virus continues to mutate and there are many unknowns.

The one near-certainty that history teaches us is that many more people than usual will contract this Novel H1N1 flu virus. We may be faced with at least ¼ of us falling ill within the next few months.

Your decisions will impact your employees, your organization, and your bottom line. You can influence the spread of this flu in your workplace, and its effect on your business.

I've attached tools, including a draft email to your employees, campaign logos and a sample poster. We will continue to post tools and info at our website, [www.WeArePublicHealth.org](http://www.WeArePublicHealth.org). In addition, the CDC has posted tools and guidance at [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov). You can also get updated information by following us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/maricopahealth](http://www.twitter.com/maricopahealth).

Why does this flu matter to you? The number of employees who are sick or have sick children could have a profound affect on business. When your employee is sick or must stay home with a sick child, you can expect that they may be out for up to a week or more. Employees who come to work sick only make things worse for you in the long run, as they may spread the disease to their coworkers (or your customers).

Here are things you should consider:

### **Policies for staying home when ill (and for sending ill employees home)**

This really will make a difference in slowing the spread of disease. I realize that such absenteeism may be difficult to accommodate, especially during these tough economic times. But you should have less absenteeism in the long run if you keep sick people out of the workplace and away from your other employees.

### **Policies for parents**

In addition, please accommodate your employees who are parents and must leave work to pick up their sick child from school, or who must stay home with a child who is ill or whose school has been closed. Our ability to slow the spread of this in the community hinges on limiting spread in the schools.

### **Good hygiene**

We should all get in the habit, now, of practicing good hygiene to protect ourselves and others – washing our hands, keeping our hands away from our faces, covering our coughs and sneezes. Please see the attached materials for ways you can reinforce this among your staff.



## **Vaccine**

Although we are still awaiting the vaccine for the Novel H1N1 flu, we do have a vaccine for regular, seasonal flu. Encourage employees to get themselves and their families vaccinated. The more people who are immunized, the better chance we have of keeping the virus from jumping from person to person to person. If your employees do not have access to the vaccine through their health care provider, they may contact Community Information & Referral at 602-263-8856 for vaccination locations. There is also good data to show that bringing a vaccine provider into the workplace can be very cost-effective for many businesses.

## **Continuity of operations plans**

If you haven't already developed a formal plan, that's OK. Think of those things you need to now. Can your business survive if a large fraction of your employees are out sick? What happens if your vendors experience such absenteeism? How might this affect your payroll? We have templates and guides to assist you in thinking through some of these issues on our website, [www.WeArePublicHealth.org](http://www.WeArePublicHealth.org).

We will continue to update our website with materials that may be pertinent to your needs. But we encourage you to talk and plan with fellow business owners and with your employees now.

If the pandemic takes a serious turn for the worse, and it becomes more virulent (causing more severe illness), we may be forced to take drastic measures to curtail the spread of disease, such as closing all schools and public events. But so far, there is no indication that the virus will require us to move in that direction.

I understand that the role of Public Health is not only to limit disease and deaths, but also to help keep our society functioning, and our economy healthy. I'm proud to say that because we recognized the level of social disruption that our actions may cause, we were the first community in the U.S. to back away from federal guidelines to close schools based on single cases of this disease (the CDC followed us a few days later). We intend to continue such a balanced approach as we go through the remainder of the pandemic.

Now we need you to step up and do your part, as well. We look forward to working together throughout this developing public health threat. Please do not hesitate to contact us at [phpio@mail.maricopa.gov](mailto:phpio@mail.maricopa.gov) with questions or needs.

Thanks in advance.

Sincerely,



Bob England, MD, MPH  
Director  
Maricopa County Department of Public Health

attachments

