



## Federal Guidelines Encourage Employers to Plan Now for Upcoming Influenza Season



Release Date: August 19, 2009

For Immediate Release  
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Department of Commerce (DOC) Secretary Gary Locke, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano today announced new guidance for businesses to plan for and respond to the upcoming flu season.

The guidance, released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is designed to help employers prepare now for the impact of seasonal and 2009 H1N1 influenza could have this fall and winter on their employers and operations.

Employers' plans should address such points as encouraging employees with flu-like symptoms or illness to stay home, operating with reduced staffing, and possibly having employees who are at higher risk of serious medical complications from infection work from home, according to the CDC guidance.

It is not known whether the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus will cause more illness or more severe illness in the coming months, but the CDC recommends that everyone be prepared for influenza. Because seasonal and 2009 H1N1 influenza pose serious health threats, employers should work with employees to develop and implement plans that can reduce the spread of flu, and to encourage seasonal flu vaccination as well as H1N1 vaccination when that vaccine becomes available.

Secretary Locke suggested businesses set the right tone in the workplace. That means implementing common sense measures to reduce the risk of spreading the flu and encouraging workers who are sick to stay home.

"The President has mobilized the federal government to get America prepared," DOC Secretary Locke said. "But government can't do it alone. For this effort to be successful, we need the business community to do its part." Making the right decisions will not only improve public health, it also has the potential to protect economic productivity: Employees who are sick and stay home will not spread the flu in the workplace.

"This new guidance will help our private sector partners continue to prepare for the upcoming flu season to keep our economy functioning and our critical infrastructure secure," said DHS Secretary Napolitano. "Ensuring business continuity is important to our cooperative efforts to keep Americans safe."

There are many actions that can be taken to help reduce the spread of flu. The guidance notes the importance of using these actions, including regular and frequent hand washing and routine cleaning of commonly touched surfaces.

"One of the most important things that employers can do is to make sure their human resources and leave policies are flexible and follow public health guidance," said HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. "If employees are sick, they need to be encouraged to stay home. If people begin to experience flu-like symptoms at work, they should be sent home and possibly encouraged to seek medical treatment."

Employers should review sick leave policies and ensure employees understand them, according to the guidance. Employers should try to make sick leave policies flexible for workers who may have to stay home with ill family members or if a child's school is closed, the CDC says.

Employers should consider offering vaccine against seasonal flu, and encourage employees to be vaccinated against seasonal and H1N1 flu, the guidance says.



Employers also might cancel non-essential face-to-face meetings and travel, and space employees farther apart, the report says. And employees who are at higher risk for flu complications might be allowed to work from home or stay home if the flu is severe, it says.

“Keeping our nation’s workers safe is a top priority,” said Deputy Secretary of Labor Seth Harris, who participated in the announcement. “Faced with a renewed H1N1 challenge during the coming flu season, we are developing tools that will help ensure America’s workers stay healthy and our businesses remain viable.”

For more information, visit [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov).

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This page was last reviewed/modified on August 19, 2009.