

SWINE (PANDEMIC) FLU for circulation to our Companies – Draft.

As the number of cases of swine flu reported in the UK increases daily we thought it would be appropriate to issue this circular to our clients to help you if and when your staff are affected.

An estimate of the number of employees who will be affected at peak of infection would be 50% of employees requiring 14 days of sick leave. An employee with definite Swine Flu and with out Medical Complications should be fit to return to work 7 days after the onset of symptoms. It is unfortunate for our purposes that this virus has a preference to attack the young and those in the working population age group. Indeed if you are 60 or over it is likely that you will have developed some resistance to this infection through being exposed to previous flu epidemics and pandemics. This virus's preference to infect the young may result in those of your employees, who have children or other dependents, taking time off to look after sick dependents (because of closure of schools and child care facilities).

It is predicted that there will be two waves of infection, the first is with us (and some say that the number of new cases in United States has peaked for now), the second peak is expected around October (the beginning of the normal flu season). To gain insight into the behaviour of this disease it is recommended that we look to the southern hemisphere (e.g. Australia, New Zealand, and Chile) where this present wave of infection coincides with the beginning of their winters. Overall the illness that the virus (H1N1) causes appears to be less severe than the illness caused by the normal seasonal flu, which usually peaks in the first or second week of January.

It is expected that there will be 2 Flu Viruses this winter, this Swine Flu Virus (H1N1) and the Seasonal Flu Virus. This will result in 2 vaccines being made available this winter. The first being the vaccine aimed at preventing the Seasonal Flu Virus and the second a vaccine aimed at preventing Swine Flu. We expect the vaccine for Seasonal Flu to be available in September/October this year and the vaccine for Swine Flu to be available by November at the earliest. Unfortunately we expect supplies of the Swine Flu vaccine to be exhausted by the "frontline services" and we do not expect to be able to obtain Swine Flu vaccine until January 2010 at the earliest.

Vaccination is the best way of avoiding infection with these viruses and some authorities suggest that the Seasonal Flu vaccine may offer some protection against Swine Flu.

The anti-viral drugs Tamiflu and Relenza are available through the NHS, we have not been able to obtain supplies at time of writing. They will reduce the length of the illness by about 48 hours.

Suggestions to maintain business continuity:

PROTECT YOUR BUSINESS.

(And to maintain core business activities at high levels of staff absenteeism) :

Ensure that the details that you have to contact employees (e.g. addresses and mobile phone numbers) are up-to-date.

Identify the Essential Functions of Your Business.

Identify options for Remote or Home working.

Expand self-service and online options for customers and business partners.

Identify which services can be curtailed or closed down.

Identify interdependencies between organisations and ensure that they are resilient (e.g. Do your suppliers have a Pandemic Flu Action Plan?).

TO PROTECT YOUR EMPLOYEES.

REMEMBER THE VULNERABLE:

The Pregnant.

Those with dependant Children.

The disabled.

Those with impaired Immunity.

Those dealing with the public.

Coughs and sneezes spread diseases and these viruses can only be spread through person-to-person contact or by a person acquiring the virus from a surface that has been infected by another -- the first rule of prevention is ISOLATION.

If it is possible for your employees to work from home or other place remote from the workplace, this would be a sensible measure.

Consider Teleconferencing.

Structure and phase the working day so as to minimise contact between employees i.e. flexible working. Allow different times for lunch and coffee breaks.

Strict personal hygiene and 'Cough Etiquette' e.g. the "Catch It, Bin It, Kill It" campaign.

Ensure that employees who are ill or think they are ill during a pandemic do not come to work.

If a member of staff becomes ill at work ensure isolation and send home.

Supply Tissues for Cough etiquette (Catch it, Bin it, Kill it).

Supply Anti-Viral Wipes for use on communal surfaces (e.g. keyboards, telephones, and hard surfaces).

Supply Anti Viral Gel for hand washing (although soap and water will deactivate the virus).

Surgical Masks are of dubious benefit, they may help prevent an employee with flu from infecting another. However they have become a "fashion statement" and by adopting this 'me-too' approach some argue masks will boost morale.

Strict procedures on sharing cups/cutlery.

Prohibit sharing telephone headsets.

Increased frequency of office cleaning particularly of communal areas.

Social distancing in offices (e.g. keep all employees 1.50- 2.0 metres apart)

Pregnant women or women up to 3 months after delivery, should not do 'Front Line' duties (by which is meant duty that requires frequent contact with the general public) .

Legal Risks Areas

1.Managing Absences in those willing but unable to work:

Suggest paying salary and benefits to those who:

1. Are ill-but not certified. GP's DO NOT welcome flu victims into their surgeries.
2. Those who are quarantined/subject to medical supervision.
3. Those with domestic commitments.

2. Managing Absences in those unwilling but able to work.

Some employees will be unwilling to work.

But before taking action consider:

1. Have preventative measures been taken?
2. What is the effect of government guidance?
3. Do they have good grounds for refusal i.e. a reasonable belief in serious and imminent danger.
4. Is there a risk of industrial action.

Prepare for Post Pandemic Recovery-NOW!

CONSIDER:

Backlog of orders or supplies etc.

Staff Morale (possibly even bereavement)

What to do if you think you have Swine Flu.

DO NOT GO TO YOUR GP OR CASUALTY IMMEDIATELY but do telephone.

Ring the Swine Flu Information Line: 0800 513513

Call your GP, who may advise you to take the antiviral drugs, the GP will issue a prescription and have a friend or neighbour collect them from the Pharmacy.

Make sure you tell your GP if you are or likely to be pregnant because the GP may advise the drug 'Relenza' instead of 'Tamiflu'.

Useful Websites/ Phone Nos;

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience/pandemicflu.aspx

NHS Direct 0845 4647

Swine Flu Information Line: 0800 513513