



Swine Flu Information and Guidelines

Please Note: The information contained in this document conveys the facts at the time of writing and as the situation changes on a regular basis, you are asked to check for further developments from the websites mentioned in this document.

With the Swine Flu cases being estimated by the NHS to be doubling every week and, on this trend, we could see over 100,000 cases per day by the end of August, the Swine Flu has become a pandemic and is going to lead high increases in absenteeism as the autumn approaches.

In tandem with our article in our recent news article we have put together this information document to help you advise your employees about this and for you to also manage the higher absenteeism you are likely to have.

With the media coverage your employees are going to believe that they have swine flu as opposed to the normal common cold or other type of flu.

We advise that you either speak to or put out a notice to all your employees trying not to create panic.

The following are the basic guidelines that you might find helpful.

What are the symptoms of swine flu?

The common symptoms are: Fever, sore throat, diarrhoea, headache, feeling generally unwell and a dry cough – in other words, symptoms very similar to seasonal influenza.

What should your employees do if they believe they have the above symptoms?

If they think they have the above symptoms, or you think they are displaying the flu-like symptoms, and have good reason to believe that they may have been exposed to the swine flu virus and they are at work then you should advise them to go home and contact their GP. Alternatively they can call the swine flu helpline on 08000 1 513 513, or call the NHS Direct line on 0845 4647, or visit the NHS Direct website:

www.nhs.uk/news/2009/04April/Pages/Swineflulatest.aspx

They should stay at home until the symptoms have been diagnosed which the doctor can usually do over the phone. If it is confirmed that it is likely they do have Swine Flu then they will be given a voucher reference entitling them to anti-viral medication. They should then ask someone who is healthy to pick up the drugs from a designated local collection centre.

However, the vaccine to protect people will only be available to vulnerable people (see below in 'who is at risk') and is not likely to be available until the end of August when the epidemic is expected to hit the 100,000 cases per day.

However, if the employee experiences serious symptoms whilst at work, such as difficulty breathing, sudden dizziness, confusion, pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen or severe vomiting then it is best to seek emergency medical care immediately.

How long will the employee be ill?

Most of swine flu have been mild and most people recover within a week, even without special treatment. Only a small number have led to serious illness and these have usually been where the person has had underlying health problems.

What should we do to reduce the risk of spreading the flu in our business?

You should do everything you can to stop swine flu from spreading such as:

- Put up the notice on your notice boards or in other prominent positions, together with the NHS' information leaflet on swine flu*.
- The notice should include that the swine flu is considered contagious and that they should:
 1. Cover their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing and use a tissue
 2. Dispose of used tissues carefully
 3. Wash their hands frequently with not water and soap or a sanitizer gel
 4. Clean hard surfaces (eg kitchen worktops, door handles) frequently using a normal cleaning product
 5. Try to avoid close contact with infected people
 6. Report to you any cases of diagnosed swine flu in any of their close friends or relatives
 7. To stay at home if they are ill and avoid contact with others as much as possible if the swine flu is diagnosed
 8. Asking them to ensure that you have their current emergency contact details
 9. Warn them about buying Tamiflu over the internet due to there having been incidents of it being fake or potentially unsafe.
- If an employee is diagnosed as having swine flu you should inform your staff, but don't panic about it.

*The NHS leaflet on swine flu can be downloaded from the Directgov website:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Swineflu/News/DG_178001

In Short: **Catch it, bin, kill it"**

How would our employees come into contact with the virus?

Unless they have been in contact with infected pigs or virus-contaminated environments, the most common contact is with a person infected with the swine flu that has been transmitted to them through coughing and sneezing of the infected people if they stand within the spread of the droplets that are expelled. However, it can be caught where the employee could touch something that has the flu viruses on it and then they touch their mouth, nose or eyes as the virus survives several hours on surfaces that have been touched by an infected person.

Also, they should take into account:

- If they have been in close contact with someone known or suspected to have swine flu
- Lived in an area of the UK where there is sustained (and continuing) person to person spread of swine flu
- Visited a country considered at high risk of swine flu (those identified at higher risk are: United States of America, Mexico, Canada, Chile, Australia, Argentina, China, Thailand and Japan.

Who is at risk?

Potentially everyone is at risk from this as few people will have resistance to this particular strain of virus.

However, there are some people who are particularly vulnerable who have or are:

- chronic lung disease
- chronic heart disease
- chronic kidney disease
- chronic liver disease
- chronic neurological disease
- immunosuppression (whether caused by disease or treatment)
- diabetes mellitus
- patients who have had drug treatment for asthma in the past three years
- pregnant
- aged 65 years and older
- children under five years old

What do we do if people have to travel?

If you have staff that travel you should warn them of the potential risks of travelling and where possible not to travel unless it is really necessary. You should seek advice about possible vaccinations they can have and that proper medical insurance cover is in place should they fall ill whilst travelling abroad. It is also advisable to call the medical insurance company to check with them for further guidance before travelling.

When they come back ensure that they have not been exposed and if so, ask them to seek medical advice before returning to work, maybe working from home for a few days if possible.

The Foreign Office contains up to date information on travel advice and you should check with them regarding their country of destination before travelling.

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country/>

You still have a duty of care for your employees' health and safety whilst they travel and just taking the time to cover the above will lower any risks to your business responsibilities.

Health and Safety

Besides the above general hygiene, if your employees are routinely in contact with the general public, it will not be necessary for them to wear masks. However, in some special cases this might be advisable. You can get further advice on this from the Department of Health's website:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyandGuidance/DH_080771

The Government has not given any guidance about avoiding mass gatherings or social events, but it is advisable as stated at the beginning of this document to regularly check for updates from all the sources mentioned in this document.

Other Considerations

As a good business, if the swine flu is diagnosed then you should be a bit more sensitive to your employees needs during times when they may have to care for family members or even, sadly bereavement.

However, like or hate it, this epidemic is going to affect your business in some way or other and you should be identifying what to do should you have a higher absence rate than normal and have some sort of disaster planning in place so that your business can remain operational with lesser staff.