

# Is Your City Ready for “Round Two” of the Swine Flu **PANDEMIC?**

The recent threat of a swine flu epidemic sent emergency managers scrambling to dust off city business continuity plans and to update response plans for pandemic emergencies.

In Corvallis, the area’s local governments met weekly during the height of the concern and developed a collaborative response to their employees, the community, and students. A number of other cities added enhanced sanitation practices and others provided information for their employees.

The U.S. government also responded by updating pandemic information on its Web sites. The World Health Organization and Centers for Disease Control predict that this particular strain of flu virus (H1N1-swine flu) is less threatening in warm weather. However, they predict that it could come back with a vengeance this winter, during our normal “flu season.” That gives cities just a few short months, to address this issue in their emergency response and business continuity plans.

## Old-Fashioned Prevention Methods Are the Key

The swine flu (H1N1) is highly infectious. It will no doubt add to the burden of this year’s seasonal influenza cases. Seasonal flu causes 36,000 deaths and more than 200,000

hospitalizations each year. Seasonal influenza spreads from human to human through coughing/sneezing and then contact with contaminated articles such as door knobs or from shaking hands.

The State of Oregon’s Public Health Division and county public health departments are coordinating efforts to get a consistent message out to local governments, schools, and the public about the importance of community prevention efforts.

Public health agencies are emphasizing the need for increased public awareness regarding “covering your cough” and old-fashioned hand-washing. These concepts play an important role in the spread of any flu, including swine flu.

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## Preparing for a Pandemic

Although this round of swine flu did not reach pandemic proportions, the next round may be different. City County Insurance Services (CIS) advises public entities to plan for rolling work shortages and additional closures similar to the shutdown of Western Oregon University and several school districts. The practice of limiting human contact in schools and other social settings, including workplaces, is becoming one of our newly-accepted prevention practices.

For public contingency planning purposes, the first wave of a community flu outbreak may last 6-8 weeks and hit workplaces in waves. With a true pandemic, absenteeism could be as high as 40 percent. Severe influenza outbreaks generally have the hardest impact on children, the elderly, and those with suppressed immune systems.

Important considerations for public employers to remember during an epidemic/pandemic include: safe workplaces for employees; keeping healthy workers on the job; encouraging ill employees to stay and/or work at home; as well as having procedures in place for employees to care for sick family members.

Some worker protection strategies to consider are:

- quarantine
- isolation
- barriers
- social distancing
- alternate work sites
- closing facilities
- working from home

## Workplace Strategies

It is essential to plan now for the coming flu season. Cities should review their emergency response plans and revise them as necessary. Training for employees, managers and public officials—especially those in key positions (primarily public safety departments)—will help to alleviate concerns or panic if a flu event occurs in any community.

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# PANDEMIC FLU *facts*

## What You Need to Know

An influenza (flu) pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of flu disease that occurs when a new type of influenza virus appears that people have not been exposed to before (or have not been exposed to in a long time). The pandemic virus can cause serious illness because people do not have immunity to the new virus. Pandemics are different from seasonal outbreaks of influenza that we see every year. Seasonal influenza is caused by influenza virus types to which people have already been exposed. Its impact on society is less severe than a pandemic, and influenza vaccines (flu shots and nasal-spray vaccine) are available to help prevent widespread illness from seasonal flu.

Influenza pandemics are different from many of the other major public health and health care threats facing our country and the world. A pandemic will last much longer than most flu outbreaks and may include “waves” of influenza activity that last 6-8 weeks separated by months.

## A Historical Perspective

In the last century there were three influenza pandemics. All of them were called pandemics because of their worldwide spread and because they were caused by a new influenza virus. The 1918 pandemic was especially severe.

**1918-1919** – Most severe, caused at least 675,000 U.S. deaths and up to 50 million deaths worldwide.

**1957-1958** – Moderately severe, caused at least 70,000 U.S. deaths and 1-2 million deaths worldwide.

**1968-1969** – Least severe, caused at least 34,000 U.S. deaths and 700,000 deaths worldwide.

## How Can Influenza Spread Between People?

Influenza is thought to be primarily spread through large droplets (droplet transmission) that directly contact the nose, mouth or eyes. These droplets are produced when infected people cough, sneeze or talk, sending the relatively large infectious droplets and very small sprays (aerosols) into the nearby air and into contact with other people. Large droplets can only travel a limited range; therefore, people should limit close contact (within 6 feet) with others when possible.

To a lesser degree, human influenza is spread by touching objects contaminated with influenza viruses and then transferring the infected material from the hands to the nose, mouth or eyes. The contribution of each route of exposure to influenza transmission is uncertain at this time and may vary based upon the characteristics of the influenza strain.

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## Swine Flu Pandemic

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Reviewing proper hand hygiene, office decontamination/sanitation, social distancing, identifying useful protective barriers such as gloves and masks, AND encouraging annual flu vaccinations will help reduce the impact on the workforce. Most of these same techniques also work for off-the-job exposure.

Employers can also help employees prepare for potential extended times when they may need to stay home. Applying the same planning process used to prepare employees for severe weather emergencies will go a long way to easing their stress about deciding to come to work or stay home, depending on the circumstance.

Another part of the planning process that can be done now is to identify tasks that can be performed in a remote office or from an employee's home. By developing potential remote work assignments now, employers can start the new budget year planning for technology changes and upgrades, such as purchasing laptops with remote and/or off-line work capacity, to support off-site work options in the case of a health crisis. ■

### Online Resources

Here is a list of helpful Web sites to use as you review and update your city's Business Continuity Plan:

**Oregon State Health Division:** [www.flu.oregon.gov](http://www.flu.oregon.gov)

**National Pandemic Planning:** [www.pandemicflu.gov/index.html](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/index.html)

**Business Planning Checklist:** [www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/businesschecklist.pdf](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/businesschecklist.pdf)

**World Health Organization** (tracking confirmed cases/country): [www.who.org](http://www.who.org)

**League of Oregon Cities:** [www.orcities.org](http://www.orcities.org)

## Pandemic Flu Facts

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### What are the Symptoms of Swine Flu in Humans?

The symptoms of swine flu in people are expected to be similar to the symptoms of regular human seasonal influenza and include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite, and coughing. Some people with swine flu also have reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

### Is There a Vaccine for Swine Flu?

Vaccines are available to be given to pigs to prevent swine influenza. However, there is no vaccine to protect humans from swine flu. The seasonal influenza vaccine will likely help provide partial protection against some swine flu viruses.

There are four different antiviral drugs that are licensed for use in the U.S. for the treatment of influenza: amantadine, rimantadine, oseltamivir, and zanamivir. While most swine influenza viruses have been susceptible to all four drugs, the most recent swine influenza viruses isolated from humans are resistant to amantadine and rimantadine. At this time, the CDC recommends the use of oseltamivir or zanamivir for the treatment and/or prevention of infection with swine influenza viruses.

### What are Everyday Actions People Can Take to Stay Healthy?

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people. Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.
- If you get sick, stay home from work and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.