

## WORKPLACE MATTERS

# Draw up a plan to limit effects of flu on business

**I**s your business ready for swine flu? As we enter the flu season, businesses face the potential added impact of H1N1, commonly

known as the “swine flu.”

The latest predictions by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control are that the H1N1 virus could affect from 40 percent to 60 percent of Americans. If 40 percent of your employees could not report for work, would your business function?



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In a recent national survey of businesses,

the Harvard School of Public Health found that just one-third believe they could sustain their business if half of their workers were absent for two weeks. The survey also found that while 74 percent of businesses offer paid sick leave for employees, only 35 percent of businesses offer paid leave that would allow employees to take care of sick family members. Even fewer — 21 percent — would allow paid time off to care for children if schools or day cares were closed.

Even if dire predictions don't come to pass, this is a good opportunity to examine how ready you are for a significant interruption due to a pandemic or other emergency.

To prepare, develop two plans: one for prevention and one for the worst case scenario.

### Prevention plan

- ◆ Educate your employees about the H1N1 virus, its symptoms and the potential medical interventions.
- ◆ Encourage employees to wash their hands frequently and use material or tissue to cover their mouth and nose when they cough or sneeze.
- ◆ Discourage employees from using other employees' phones, desks, offices or other work tools.
- ◆ Stock up on soap, tissue, hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies.
- ◆ Keep workplaces clean.
- ◆ Consider protections for workers at higher risk of flu, such as pregnant women and those with chronic health conditions. Make sure people at greater risk aren't working in close quarters with others. Restrict their exposure to the public when possible.
- ◆ Limit nonessential face-to-face meetings and travel.
- ◆ Access up-to-date information from state, local and federal authorities and share it with employees. A good central source of information can be found at [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov).
- ◆ Post updates about the virus in employee break rooms and via e-mail.
- ◆ Revisit your sick leave policy and urge employees who have flu symptoms to stay home. (See Andy Lewis' column on the facing page for more on updating your policy.)

### Worst case scenario

- ◆ Form a business continuity team to create a plan so the business will be able to continue operating.
  - ◆ Identify essential positions and cross-train three or more employees in these vital areas.
  - ◆ Develop an emergency communication plan for responding to employee and customer concerns. This could be Internet-based or a telephone hotline with a recorded phone message that is updated daily.
  - ◆ Offer telework options so employees can work from home.
  - ◆ Stagger shifts to minimize employee contact.
- More information on disaster preparedness for businesses can be found at [www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/businesschecklist.html](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/businesschecklist.html).

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*If you have questions about training your work force, contact Robin Onaclea Scott, business service coordinator at Lane Workforce Partnership, at [robino@laneworkforce.org](mailto:robino@laneworkforce.org) or (541) 682-7224.*