



## DIOCESE OF CORPUS CHRISTI

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### **Diocese of Corpus Christi Pandemic Response Guidelines for Diocesan Corporations, Agencies & Institutions 2009-2010 H1N1 Influenza Season**

#### **Conditions:**

#### **Recommended Action Steps under Current Flu (similar severity as in Spring/Summer 2009)**

If the severity of illness in the fall and winter is similar to that observed in the spring and summer of 2009, the effects of 2009 H1N1 influenza may not have substantial impacts on absenteeism. When larger numbers of people become ill, correspondingly larger numbers of people will become seriously ill and may require hospitalization.

#### ***Sick persons should stay home***

Advise employees to be alert to any signs of fever and any other signs of influenza-like illness before reporting to work each day, and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are ill. Employees who are ill should not travel while they are ill.

- CDC recommends that employees with influenza-like illness remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100° F [37.8° C] or greater), or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- Expect sick employees to be out for about 3 to 5 days in most cases, even if antiviral medications are used.
- Implement a flexible sick leave policy, if an employee has exhausted their short term sick leave, they will be eligible for long term sick leave with written confirmation of H1N1 flu from a physician.
- Talk with companies that service contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home.
- A physicians' note is not required for employees who are ill with influenza-like illness if employee has short term sick leave to cover the absence. A physician's note will be required if eligibility for long term sick leave will require negotiations with Human Resources.
- Employees who are well but who have an ill family member at home with influenza can go to work as usual. However, these employees should monitor their health every day, and notify their supervisor and stay home if they become ill. Employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for an ill family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for ill children or other ill family members than is usual. Eligibility for long term sick leave will be negotiated with Human Resources; verification from physician of H1N1 flu for family member must be submitted for consideration.

### ***Sick employees at work should be asked to go home***

- **CDC recommends that employees who appear to have an influenza-like illness upon arrival or become ill during the day be promptly separated from other employees and be advised to go home** until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100° F [37.8° C] or greater), or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- Those who become ill with symptoms of an influenza-like illness during the work day should be:
  - Separated from other employees and asked to go home promptly.
  - When possible and if they can tolerate it, employees with influenza-like illness should be given a surgical mask to wear before they go home if they cannot be placed in an area away from others.
- If an employee becomes ill at work, inform fellow employees of their possible exposure in the workplace to influenza-like illness but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

### ***Cover coughs and sneezes***

- Influenza viruses are thought to spread mainly from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. Provide employee messages on the importance of covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or, in the absence of a tissue, one's sleeve. Place posters in the worksite that encourages cough and sneeze etiquette.
- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.

### ***Improve hand hygiene***

- Influenza may be spread via contaminated hands. Instruct employees to wash their hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner, especially after coughing or sneezing. Place posters in the worksite that encourage hand hygiene.
- Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand sanitizers in the workplace. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. If feasible, place hand sanitizers in multiple locations or in conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene.

### ***Clean surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact***

- Frequently clean all commonly touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
- No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended.

### ***Encourage employees to get vaccinated***

- Encourage your employees to get vaccinated for seasonal influenza. The Diocese of Corpus Christi will sponsor seasonal flu clinics in the Corpus Christi area in conjunction with HEB on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup>. (Times and places of clinics will be announced in September.) Other areas are encouraged to contact their local HEB pharmacy or other local pharmacy to possibly coordinate a seasonal flu clinic for employees, volunteers and parishioners. Promote clinics in bulletins, newsletters, and posters in high traffic areas.
- Encourage your employees also to get vaccinated for 2009 H1N1 influenza when vaccines are available to them. Different groups are prioritized for 2009 H1N1 influenza than for seasonal influenza. As soon as available, the diocese will publicize H1N1 vaccination prioritized groups and clinic locations.

- Offer opportunities at your worksite for influenza vaccination. If possible, the diocese will coordinate with HEB to administer H1N1 vaccinations. Other areas are encouraged to contact their local HEB pharmacy or other local pharmacy to possibly coordinate a H1N1 flu clinic.
- Review health benefits and covering the cost of seasonal flu vaccinations with the Diocesan Human Resources Department. The H1N1 vaccination expense is under consideration with the US Health Department, more information to follow.

***Take measures to protect employees who are at higher risk for complications of influenza***

- People at higher risk for complications from influenza include pregnant women; children under 5 years of age; adults and children who have chronic lung disease (such as asthma), heart disease, diabetes, diseases that suppress the immune system and other chronic medical conditions; and those who are 65 years or older.
- Inform employees that some people are at higher risk of complications from influenza and that if they are at higher risk for complications, they should check with their health care provider if they become ill. Early treatment with antiviral medications is very important for people at high risk because it can prevent hospitalizations and deaths.
- Encourage employees recommended for seasonal influenza vaccine and 2009 H1N1 vaccines to get vaccinated as soon as these vaccines are available. Encourage employees to obtain a prescription for an antiviral medication for themselves and their family members.
- Employees who become ill and are at increased risk of complications from influenza and ill employees who are concerned about their illness should call their health care provider for advice. Their health care provider might want them to take antiviral medications to reduce the likelihood of severe complications from the influenza.

***Prepare for increased numbers of employee absences due to illness in employees and their family members, and plan ways for essential business functions to continue.***

- Diocesan entities should plan to monitor and respond to absenteeism at their workplaces. Implement plans to continue your essential functions in case you experience higher than usual absenteeism. Elevated absentee rates can be due to sick employees, those who need to stay home and care for others, or from employees with conditions that make them at higher risk for complications.
- Cross-train personnel to perform essential functions so your workplace is able to operate even if key staff are absent.
- Assess your essential functions and the reliance that others and the community have on your Church services, ministries and office operations. Be prepared to change your mode of operation if needed to maintain critical operations (e.g. handling and counting collections, identify alternative volunteers for specific ministry needs, suspend temporarily ministries and functions, public and private conferences, RCIA, home visitation, festivals, etc.) Follow all directives from the Diocesan Bishop on celebration of the Mass and Sacraments.

***Advise employees before traveling to take certain steps***

- Advise employees to check themselves for fever and any other signs of influenza-like illness before starting travel and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are ill.
- Employees who become ill while traveling and are at increased risk of complications from influenza and others concerned about their illness should promptly call a health care provider for advice.

- Ensure employees who become ill while traveling or on temporary assignment understand that they should notify their supervisor.
- Before traveling outside the United States on diocesan business, contact the Human Resources Department on procedures for obtaining medical care should an employee fall ill and need medical care and/or finding an appropriate health care provider in that country. A U.S. consular officer can help locate health care services.

***Prepare for the possibility of school dismissal or temporary closure of child care programs***

- Although school dismissals or closures of child care programs are not likely to be generally recommended at this level of severity, they are possible in some jurisdictions.
- Be prepared to allow employees to stay home to care for children if schools are dismissed or child care programs are closed.
- Parents should not bring their children with them to work while schools are dismissed.
- Eligibility for long term sick leave to care for ill or dismissed school children will be negotiated with Human Resources; verification from physician of H1N1 flu or verification of school closing for the child must be submitted for consideration.
- Cross-train employees to cover essential functions.

## Under Conditions with Increased Severity Compared to Spring/Summer 2009

If 2009 H1N1 becomes more severe than during spring/summer 2009, absenteeism will likely be far greater, and additional protective measures to slow the spread of influenza may be considered. Check with your local health department for the extent and severity of disease activity in your community and for recommendations for necessary measures. Decisions about what tools should be used during a severe 2009 H1N1 outbreak should be based on the observed severity of the event; its impact on specific subpopulations; the need to protect employees; the expected benefit of the interventions; the feasibility of success of implementing these measures; the direct and indirect costs of different interventions; and the effects on critical infrastructure, health care delivery, and society. The following are measures that should be considered if influenza severity increases, and are meant for use *in addition* to the measures outlined above.

***Consider active screening of employees who report to work***

- If influenza severity increases, at the beginning of the workday, all employees should be asked about symptoms consistent with an influenza illness such as fever or chills AND cough or sore throat. If the severity or the impact of influenza increases, CDC recommends that persons with an influenza-like illness not come to work or travel and remain at home for at least 7 days, even if symptoms resolve sooner. Individuals who are still sick 7 days after they become ill should continue to stay home until at least 24 hours after symptoms have resolved. If influenza severity increases, CDC recommends that people stay home at least 7 days whether or not antiviral medications are used.
- A physician's note will be required for eligibility of long term sick leave.
- Make contingency plans for increased absenteeism caused by illness in employees or illness in employees' family members that would require them to stay home. Planning for absenteeism could include cross-training current employees or hiring temporary employees.

***Consider alternative work environments for employees at higher risk for complications of influenza during periods of increased influenza activity in the community***

- Employees with an underlying chronic medical condition or who are pregnant should consider calling their health care provider for advice about how to reduce their risk of exposure to influenza and, if they get sick, how best to get early treatment for influenza.
- If influenza severity increases and if influenza transmission is high in the community, employers may want to evaluate their work environment to see how they can reduce the number of people that high-risk employees come in contact with. Employers can also think about how employees at higher risk for influenza complications could be reassigned to duties that have minimal contact with other employees or outside visitors.
- CDC recommends that ill employees at higher risk of complications from influenza seek early treatment if they become ill.

***Consider increasing social distancing in and out of the workplace***

- If influenza severity increases, local public health officials may recommend that employers implement measures to increase the physical distance between people in the workplace to reduce the spread of influenza. The goal should be for there to be at least 6 feet of distance between people at most times. This is not a simple or easy strategy and would typically require considerable flexibility.
- Measures may include avoiding crowded work settings, canceling business-related face-to-face meetings, canceling scheduled public conferences (religious, informational, technical), spacing employees farther apart, canceling non-essential travel, increasing use of teleworking and teleconferencing, and using staggered shifts to allow fewer employees to be in the workplace at the same time.
- Recommendations to increase social distancing may affect community functioning. Because supply chain issues may be affected, make sure you have plans for back-up suppliers.

***Consider canceling non-essential business travel and advising employees about possible disruptions while traveling overseas***

- If the severity of the outbreak worldwide increases in the fall or winter, public health officials may recommend social distancing strategies which include canceling non-essential travel and travel restrictions may be enacted by some countries which may limit the ability of employees to return home if they become ill while on travel status.
- If influenza severity increases, travelers should also be prepared for travel delays, health screenings, and other activities targeted towards travelers. Provide information to travelers about contingency plans and how their travel can be rebooked for these possible delays.

***Prepare for school dismissal or closure of child care programs***

- School dismissals and closure of child care programs are more likely at higher levels of severity. Be prepared to allow employees to stay home to care for their children if schools are dismissed or child care programs are closed. If dismissal is needed, schools are being advised to dismiss students for at least 5 to 7 calendar days or longer if necessary.
- Encourage employees who perform essential functions and who have children to plan for contingencies should local child care programs close or schools dismiss students.
- Be prepared for prolonged absenteeism if schools dismiss students for an extended time. Eligibility for long term sick leave to care for ill or dismissed school children will be negotiated with Human Resources; verification from physician of H1N1 flu or verification of school closing for the child must be submitted for consideration.

- Parents should not bring their children with them to work while schools are dismissed.
- Consider implementing flexible workplace policies and staggering shifts.
- Cross-train employees to cover essential functions.

***Other considerations***

- As part of comprehensive pandemic planning, consider arranging with a local HEB or other area pharmacy to reserve a number of doses of influenza antiviral drugs to be available for key employees during a pandemic. Encourage employees to obtain a prescription from their own physician for an influenza antiviral drug for themselves and their family members.
- Employers should be aware that the severity of 2009 H1N1 influenza could change rapidly; therefore, local public health recommendations to communities and businesses could be revised quickly. Planners should identify sources of timely and accurate information so they are aware of changes to recommendations and can promptly implement revised or additional measures recommended by local public health officials.