



## GuideOne Center for Risk Management Fact Sheet: H1N1 Flu and Pandemic Flu

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### **What is H1N1 flu?**

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the H1N1 flu virus is a novel virus that was first detected in the United States in April 2009. It was originally called swine flu because many of the genes in the new virus were similar to those that normally infect pigs. However, further study showed that this virus is different from what is typically considered swine flu.

### **What is the concern?**

Most people have little or no immunity against this virus and therefore the illness can spread relatively easily. It appears to be as contagious as the normal seasonal flu and is spreading relatively rapidly. The good news is that, at this time, the virus has tended to be no more severe than the normal seasonal flu. It is expected that cases of H1N1 flu will peak between November 2009 and March 2010. Because the virus has spread to multiple countries around the world, the World Health Organization (WHO) has categorized this virus as a *pandemic flu*, meaning that there is a global outbreak of the illness.

### **How do people become infected with the virus?**

According to the CDC, spread of this H1N1 virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their eyes, mouth or nose.

### **What are the symptoms?**

The H1N1 flu in humans usually begins much like seasonal flu, with symptoms, such as fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches, chills, fatigue and, in some cases, diarrhea and vomiting.

### **What is the treatment?**

Most people recover from this illness without treatment by a health care provider. Still, people should check with their health care provider about whether they should take antiviral medications and about any special care they might need if they are pregnant or have a health condition such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma or emphysema.

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This material is for informational purposes only. It is not intended to give specific legal or risk management advice, nor are any suggested checklists or actions plans intended to include or address all possible risk management exposures or solutions. You are encouraged to retain your own expert consultants and legal advisors in order to develop a risk management plan specific to your own activities. For more information, contact the GuideOne Center for Risk Management at (877) 448-4331, ext. 5118 for Church and Schools, or ext. 5175 for Senior Living Communities.

<https://www.guideonecenter.com>



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## What can you do about the H1N1 flu?

At this time, the CDC recommends the same precautions against the H1N1 flu as against seasonal flu, specifically:

1. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
2. If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. Health officials are currently recommending individuals to stay home and avoid contact with others for 24 hours after their fever has ended. By doing so, you will help prevent others from catching your illness.
3. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. By doing so, it may prevent those around you from getting sick.
4. Wash your hands often to help protect you from germs.
5. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
6. Practice other good health habits by getting plenty of sleep, being physically active, managing your stress, drinking plenty of fluids, and eating nutritious food.
7. Talk to your health care provider about the new H1N1 vaccine.

In addition, churches should consider postponing travel plans to any areas where human cases of swine flu infection have been confirmed.

## What should our congregation do to prepare for the threat of a pandemic flu?

Government authorities have suggested that organizations become prepared for the threat of a severe pandemic flu. To prepare, churches may want to consider the following:

1. Form a Safety and Security Team in your congregation. One of the tasks of the team should be to prepare for emergencies including the possibility of a pandemic flu outbreak.
2. The team should become informed about pandemic flu through reliable resources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Web site information provided on the next page). Stay abreast of developments concerning potential pandemic flu situations. Look for information from your local and state departments of public health. Those Web sites can be accessed through the links posted at [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/international/relres.html](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/international/relres.html).
3. Be prepared for the eventuality of a severe pandemic flu outbreak among humans. Develop contingent plans for your congregation in the event of such an outbreak. These plans should include the following:
  - Teaching the congregation to utilize alternative greetings other than shaking hands and hugging.



- Considering alternatives to the common Communion cup and passing the offering plate or attendance pads.
- Providing education to the congregation about the importance of sanitary practices, such as frequent hand washing, covering the mouth when coughing or sneezing, and avoiding hand contact with the eyes and nose.
- Making sure that food safety practices are followed in the church kitchen. Suspend food events (particularly potlucks) during the course of a severe flu outbreak.
- Providing ample soap, hand sanitizer, tissues and trash receptacles at your facility. Trash receptacles containing used tissues should be emptied frequently using latex gloves.
- Shutting off common drinking water fountains.
- Regularly sanitizing toys and equipment in the nursery and toddler areas.
- Developing a plan for communicating with the congregation. Consider several different methods of contact, including telephone trees, e-mail, text messaging, Web site announcements, etc. Then, test the contact methods to be sure they work.
- Preparing to close the congregation's nursery, daycare, preschool, and even Sunday School programs in the event of a severe pandemic flu outbreak.

In a severe outbreak, local authorities may prohibit large public gatherings. Churches should consider contingency plans for their financial continuity in the event of such a situation.

## Where can we find additional information?

Helpful Web Sites:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/)

U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services: [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)

World Health Organization: [www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html)

In addition, find "A Guide for Community and Faith-Based Organizations" at <http://flu.gov/professional/community/cfboguidance.html>.

Sources: Centers for Disease Prevention and Control; United States Department of Health and Human Services.