

# Safe Harbors

November, 2009

A Loss Control And Risk Management Communication

## Responding to the Threat of Pandemic Flu



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As if our world wasn't already complicated enough, it appears to have become even more so with this year's pandemic flu outbreak and the myriad uncertainties surrounding it.

Unfortunately, many of the recent flu-related headlines appear grim. In addition, just a few weeks ago President Barack Obama declared a "national emergency" with respect to the "swine flu" (H1N1 influenza virus). Moreover, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported on its website that as of the end of October 2009, 48 of the United States reported widespread influenza activity with over 1,000 deaths already having been attributed to it. And, physicians and scientists have warned that widespread illness due to the swine flu may be taking hold around the world.

Unlike seasonal flu, pandemic flu is caused by a new strain of influenza virus that most people have not previously been exposed to. Pandemic flu often travels rapidly around the world and, like other seasonal flu, can be deadly. Although vaccines for the swine flu are currently being developed and distributed, the vaccines are in short supply and may not be the "end all" if this virus mutates (as many viruses are prone to do).

While there are certainly good reasons to be concerned about this year's flu outbreak, there are things your organization can still do to likely help prevent or mitigate the flu's spread. Furthermore, if your organization

takes action steps now, it may minimize the risk that its goals, operations and revenues will be jeopardized if a severe pandemic causes, among other things, people to be home for weeks at a time, community transportation to be curtailed, and emergency services to be disrupted.

If your organization has employees, volunteers or clients who are in contact with the general public, you should develop a plan to provide helpful ways to prepare for and respond to the spread of pandemic illness. Once the plan is developed, it should be preliminarily (and periodically thereafter) tested, reviewed and modified to help assure its effectiveness.

As you develop your plan, there are many important aspects to consider. The following is a list of general recommendations and "common sense" strategies for you to consider in getting prepared for a pandemic outbreak:

- Be informed about the current situation and what's happening around you
- Avoid person-to-person contacts through coughing, sneezing, touching
- Address how you will continue to care for your most vulnerable clients
- Stay at home or away from others if you are infected or have flu-like symptoms
- Wear surgical masks if there's a high likelihood that others may be infected



If your organization has employees, volunteers or clients who are in contact with the general public, you should develop a plan to provide helpful ways to prepare for and respond to the spread of pandemic illness.

- Wash your hands frequently and with appropriate sanitizers
- Avoid touching your face, mouth, nose or eyes
- Dispose properly of tissues, trash bags and personal articles
- Sanitize phones, desk surfaces and shared eating utensils
- Get a seasonal flu shot and H1N1 vaccine for vulnerable staff or clients
- Clean work surfaces and other surfaces, equipment and items
- Maintain adequate supplies of cleaners, masks, and other essential items
- Provide health-related "quick reference" guides, checklists, clinic locations, and other information
- Train employees, volunteers and clients, as appropriate, on your plan's elements

Finally, remember that good information, preparation and education are among the best tools you have to help prevent injury and loss. As we all combat the threats related to this year's pandemic flu, we encourage you to visit the following U.S. government websites for more guidance:

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

**Department of Homeland Security**

[www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov)

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Service**

[www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)

Or, contact a Riverport loss control consultant.

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**Home Office:**

222 South Ninth Street, Suite 1300  
Minneapolis, MN 55402-3332  
Main Line: 612.766.3100  
Fax: 612.766.3099  
Toll Free: 888.762.3083

*Mailing Address:*

P.O. Box 948  
Minneapolis, MN 55440-0948

[www.riverportinsurance.com](http://www.riverportinsurance.com)

**Western Region Office**

1383 North McDowell Boulevard, Suite 350  
Petaluma CA 94954-1190  
Main Line: 415.898.9600  
Fax: 415.898.9656  
Toll Free: 800.361.1075

