

October 20, 2009

Dear Care Provider:

SUBJECT: PROTECTING YOURSELF AGAINST THE H1N1 (SWINE) FLU

As you are all aware, cases of the H1N1 (Swine) flu were first detected in the United States in April 2009. This new virus has continued to spread person to person throughout the United States and the world. On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization declared that a global pandemic of 2009 H1N1 flu was underway.

To assist care providers, the California Department of Social Services has continued to work with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) to identify steps that you can take to help prevent the spread of the H1N1 flu in your facility or school. As part of that process, the handout [Tips for Licensees on H1N1 \(Swine\) and Seasonal Influenza](#) was prepared. Moreover, as our partners in protecting clients in care, the following information about the H1N1 flu should assist you in ensuring that the risk to clients in licensed facilities is diminished. We also encourage you to visit the website links provided on page three.

What is the H1N1 (Swine) flu?

According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2009 H1N1 is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. This virus is sometimes called the “swine flu” because it was originally thought to be similar to flu viruses that normally occur in pigs (swine) in North America. But it was later found that the H1N1 virus has two genes from flu viruses that normally occur in pigs in Europe and Asia, and bird (avian) genes and human genes.

The symptoms of the H1N1 flu are similar to the symptoms of the regular (seasonal) flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fever. Some people also have diarrhea and vomiting associated with the H1N1 flu. The H1N1 flu is also spread in much the same way as the seasonal flu, mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with the flu. It is also possible to become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it, such as a surface or an object, and then touching your mouth or nose.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

According to public health officials, vaccination is the most important prevention measure. CDPH recommends that all clients and facility staff be vaccinated against the seasonal flu as soon as possible. However, the seasonal flu vaccine is not expected to protect

against the H1N1 flu, or vice versa. At this time, the CDC does not expect a shortage of the H1N1 vaccine, but availability and demand can be unpredictable. Watch for information about the availability of the H1N1 vaccine in your area. For example, visit CDPH's [H1N1 Vaccination Locations](#) website. If you have any questions about the seasonal vaccine or the H1N1 vaccine, check with your healthcare provider.

The CDC is recommending that certain groups most at risk receive the H1N1 vaccine when it first becomes available. Those target groups are: pregnant women; people who live with or care for children younger than six months of age; healthcare and emergency medical services personnel; persons between the ages of six months and 24 years old; and people aged 25 through 64 years old who are at higher risk because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems.

In addition, there are everyday actions that you can take to help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like the flu. Take these everyday steps to protect your health and the health of those around you:

- 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 hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with the flu, the CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school until you have been fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication. A temperature of 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius) is a fever. You should also limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

What should I do if I get sick?

If you develop flu-like symptoms, it is generally recommended that you stay home and get plenty of rest and fluids. But if your symptoms are severe or you are at high risk for complications, call your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider may prescribe an antiviral medication like Tamiflu. Also, please be aware that the CDC warns that children aged 18 years old and younger who have the flu should not be given aspirin or aspirin-containing products because of the risk of Reye syndrome. While most people have recovered from the H1N1 flu without medical attention, hospitalizations and deaths due to illness caused by the H1N1 virus have occurred.

For children, the CDC has identified the following emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish or gray skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Severe or persistent vomiting

- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

For adults, the CDC has identified the following emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

What should I do if a client gets sick at my facility?

As a licensee, you are expected to follow the regulations and to ensure that clients' medical needs are addressed. That may mean that you will have to take additional precautions to ensure that clients are not exposed to the flu and that you have sufficient staff on duty. If you suspect that one of your clients is ill with the flu, you should contact the client's healthcare provider. You should also report any suspected outbreaks to your licensing program analyst and to the [local health department](#). Please see the attached [Tips for Licensees on H1N1 \(Swine\) and Seasonal Influenza](#) for more information about precautions that facility staff can take when caring for a client who has the flu. You can also share this letter and the handout with clients' family members to provide them with additional information.

Can I get H1N1 (Swine) flu from eating or preparing pork?

No. The H1N1 virus is not spread by food. You cannot get the H1N1 flu from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

Please visit the following websites for more information:

- CDC at: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services at: www.flu.gov/
- CDPH at: www.cdph.ca.gov; and <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/SwineInfluenza.aspx>

Sincerely,

Original signed by Jeffrey Hiratsuka

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