

Flu Update #2

With the new pandemic H1N1 flu virus, this likely will be a very active flu season. It is likely that multiple flu strains will circulate. Frequently people with the flu are sick for a week or longer. Between staff being sick, those caring for someone who is sick, and any school closures, it is estimated that absentee rates in hard hit areas could be as high as 40%. Now is the time to plan ahead and take the steps necessary to allow your agency/facility to operate safely this fall and winter. Below are a set of recommendations that will help you be prepared. Also attached is the most recent fact sheet from Public Health. Please post where all staff can see.

1. Help your staff get vaccinated with both regular seasonal flu and novel H1N1 flu vaccines as soon as they are available.
2. Look at your absentee policies. Do staff feel comfortable and have the tools necessary to stay home if they are sick? You don't want one person getting everyone else sick.
3. Do you know which of your staff have children who would be impacted by school closure; and which could have other family obligations?
4. Have you talked with your staff about them developing their own personal emergency plans for their home and family? If they are comfortable that things are safe and handled at home, they are more likely to be able to work.
5. Are you emphasizing good, frequent hand washing? If it becomes a habit now, it will help keep staff well during the flu season.
6. Pull out your emergency plan and look at the staffing/pandemic section. Have you and staff creatively thought through strategies to keep people safe with high absenteeism? Remember if your community is really impacted, everyone may be short on staff and usual solutions may not work. Now is the time to beef up this section. Have you thought about contacting recent retirees or others who may be willing to step in if staffing gets really tight? If this involves pulling staff from other functions, can you cross-train now? Can you get any needed background checks done now? Is your plan coordinated with other providers who are important to your services (suppliers, other providers providing services to those you serve, such as vocational programs)?

7. Consider assigning one/two staff to make contact with the local public health department and to regularly check the websites (especially www.flu.oregon.gov) for updates.