



# OSH Heads-Up

Tri-State Occupational Health and WORKSAFE IOWA  
MEDICAL ASSOCIATES/Mercy

## **“Prepare against the threatening foe your trustiest shield”--William Wordsworth**

“Preparedness” is the word of the day, isn’t it? now that 2009 ushered in the first influenza pandemic in more than 40 years, and we face a flu season that may come earlier and be more severe due to the new H1N1 virus.

Did you know that flu pandemics typically have “waves” of up to 14 weeks when larger numbers of people get sick? and that we may be facing these waves of H1N1 for several years? You need business plans and HR policies that are not only ready but can be modified depending on how the severity of each flu outbreak affects your workplace.

A useful “toolkit” has been created by the University of Minnesota, in partnership with the Society for Human Resource Management. This online document (in pdf format) is filled with “Human Resource Policies, Protocols, Templates, Tools, & Tips” that will help you develop the right mix of strategies to

- reduce workforce exposure to the virus
- encourage employees to get immunized, and
- support their recovery if they become ill

Obviously, the high-priority issue for HR professionals is protecting employees. Combating “presenteeism” is the most important action you can take, according to the toolkit’s authors. Obviously, that tendency of workers to come to work even though they’re ill not only affects individual productivity but the collective health of your workforce.

You can make sure that pay and leave policies do not penalize ill workers for staying home—and you may need to consider some new policies regarding employees working from home. You can also assist an employer in identifying functions that can be covered by cross-trained employees when critical employees are absent.

As your company develops the appropriate proportional response that fits the risk at hand, you may be serving “on the front lines of pandemic preparedness,” but you can be well equipped.

*“Doing Business During an Influenza Pandemic” (pdf) –*  
[www.cidrap.umn.edu/cidrap/files/33/cidrap-shrm-hr-pandemic-toolkit.pdf](http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/cidrap/files/33/cidrap-shrm-hr-pandemic-toolkit.pdf)