

# Swine Flu update



It is clear from the news and current World Health Organisation (WHO) rating, that Swine Flu is something we should all be aware of, but the warnings should be put in perspective as at the current time. Employers in the UK should take note of advice issued by the Department of Health and keep up to date with news broadcasts. People who have recently travelled to Mexico or been in contact with someone who has been recently are seen as the most at risk of having been exposed to Swine Flu.

## What is Swine Flu?

Swine flu is a form of influenza that originated in pigs but can be caught by, and spread among, people. It has similar symptoms to normal flu, typically the type we are exposed to in winter months.

It is worth noting that there is currently a low risk associated with swine flu and the sensible approach is to follow any guidelines issued by the Department of Health. If there is someone in the office who has or is displaying flu-like symptoms and has recently travelled to Mexico or been in contact with someone who has, it would be advisable to send that person home and get them to contact either their GP or NHS Direct.

## How should a business deal with its employees when discussing Swine Flu?

- State the facts and make sure they are aware of any updates.
- Promote safety steps.
- Don't cause alarm or panic. If someone is coughing and sneezing, it doesn't mean they have Swine Flu, deal with it sensibly.
- Remind everyone about the sickness absence policy and the consequences of not following it.
- If things do develop further and guidelines are issued then devise an action plan on staffing arrangements, travel, supplier networks etc... should Swine Flu impact your business and any key members of staff.

## What should a business do if one of their employees is diagnosed with Swine Flu?

It would be advisable to ensure everyone who has had contact with any affected employees are monitored closely. If at any point they start to display any symptoms then they should contact their local GP or NHS Direct. At this stage there is no advice for large closures of public places or working environments as part of control measures.

It would of course be advisable to make sure there is a thorough clean of all hard surfaces to reduce the spread of infection. Individuals can reduce the risk of infection by making sure a tissue is used when sneezing or coughing, immediately disposing of it and washing hands regularly.

If an employee or a number of employees are off sick then normal sickness absence rules should apply, the key as always is not to discriminate or treat anyone differently and apply the same rules to all staff.

If you think someone is not genuinely ill and you of course have evidence to support this, you need to refer to your sickness absence rules and managing disciplinary guidelines.

### Useful contacts numbers

**Swine Flu information line 0800 1 513 513**

**NHS Direct 0845 46 47**

**Swine Flu Leaflet**