



Communication Plan H1N1 Pandemic

Human Resource Management
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<http://oregon.gov/das/hr/flu.shtml>

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Introduction and Goals

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic for the H1N1 flu (novel influenza A) in June 2009. The virus continues to spread and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) expect more cases as the regular flu season approaches.

Given the prospect of widespread cases of H1N1, Oregon state government must take a proactive approach to minimize the effects of the flu season to the greatest extent possible.

The elements of this plan address the state's role as an employer. The plan provides a structure to ensure clarity and consistency in the application of human resource policies and collective bargaining agreements across all state agencies during a pandemic.

The plan relies on coordination with other entities, but does not guide or direct external processes, such as:

- State agencies' business continuity plans
- The role of the Public Health Division of the Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Oregon Emergency Management (OEM)
- Public Employees' Benefit Board (PEBB)

This communication plan will help the state accomplish these three goals:

1. Deliver a consistent message to employees and managers in all state agencies.
2. Enhance the health and wellness of state employees.
3. Raise awareness of the value of business continuity planning to enable agencies to deliver services to Oregonians despite fluctuations in the workforce.

Approach

This communication plan outlines core messages for delivery to target audiences by means of various communication tools.

Development of messages will involve two key partners: the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) and the human resources office of DHS. Authors will rely on official sources for all references to the physical or medical aspects of the pandemic.

DAS and DHS will designate a single point of contact for the H1N1 pandemic as it relates to management of the state's workforce.

Delivery of messages will occur through the following state listservs: DAS ExecNet, State Communications Council, statewide HR directors. Thereafter, each agency will determine the method of delivery and final content for internal messages to staff. Although the state is "one employer," this plan allows agencies to customize messages to account for differences among agencies' operations such as: centralized in one locale; decentralized with field offices; 24/7 facilities; staff without electronic access.

The primary means of message delivery is electronic. However, in-person communications will serve as an important channel to ensure that communications flow both directions rather than only top-down.

Communication during the pandemic will involve flexibility. In some cases, planned messages may change at the last minute due to unforeseen circumstances. The people responsible for message development or delivery will adapt, using the best available information.

Core Messages

The state’s core messages generally apply to all employees, and will be augmented with additional guidance for managers as needed.

1. Prepare for flu season at home: Create a plan for your family’s needs before flu season begins (childcare, alternate transportation, food, emergency contacts, etc.). Communications will include tips to consider.
2. Prepare for flu season at work: Ensure the business continuity plans of each work unit are up-to-date. Communications will include tips to consider.
3. Stay well during flu season: Follow the recommendations of the CDC and the Public Health Division. Repeat the recommendations in communications.
4. State government will remain “open” to serve Oregonians in all but the most adverse circumstances.
5. Pay attention to official communications: Stay informed through information from official sources — the Public Health Division, CDC, WHO, DAS, PEBB, and messages from your agency’s director or HR office.
6. Seek clarity on how state policies apply to a given employment situation. Optimally, employees should understand work rules prior to the beginning of flu season.

Target Audience

The scope of this communication plan limits the target audience to individuals who work in state offices and facilities.

External audiences such as the public and media will receive information about the pandemic from other sources such as the Public Health Division.

If the media contacts DAS for information on management of the state’s workforce during

the pandemic, the DAS Public Affairs Manager will handle the request per usual procedures and coordinate with stakeholders, including the Governor’s Office, as needed. DAS will follow regular procedures if the agency determines the need to issue a media release during the pandemic regarding a topic under the agency’s authority.

Processes and Tools

Sample Messages

Based on this plan’s core messages, DAS and DHS will develop messages for distribution in all agencies. See Appendices A - C for the first three sample messages.

In addition, a template for future messages will serve as a guide for statewide or agency-specific messages as needed. See Appendix D.

Timeline for Messages

August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare personally as state government prepares • Access the information or services offered by PEBB
Early-Sept.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue personal and work-related preparations • Stay well • Access the information or services offered by PEBB • Declare, recognize state government will stay open
Early-Oct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay informed via official channels • Continue preventive measures
Throughout flu season	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow announced HR rules and procedures for workforce issues • Stay informed via official channels • Continue preventive measures • Base messages on current events or circumstances
After flu season	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announce follow-up activities as needed

Statewide Message Delivery

DAS will issue statewide messages to agencies electronically. In-person meetings also will occur between the DAS Director and agency directors who meet regularly as a group.

Statewide delivery tools:

- E-mail
- Web site (DAS site, and Oregon.gov as needed or appropriate)
- Building-closure phone line (only as it relates to closure of buildings in the Salem and Portland metro areas)
- E-newsletters
- Links to printed materials from official sources
- Other tools (physical or electronic) that meet a business need not met by an existing tool

Agencies' Message Delivery

Agencies may deliver the statewide messages provided under this plan in the manner deemed most appropriate by the agency. Agencies may alter content as needed to fit the agency's circumstances *as long as the essential meaning of the message does not change.*

Agencies' delivery tools:

- E-mail
- Web site, intranet, or both
- In-person meetings (all-staff meetings; meetings at the division or work-unit level; meetings between employees and HR staff)
- Bulletin boards (physical or electronic)
- Call trees
- Newsletters (physical or electronic)
- Posters – See Appendix E for a sample poster and visit the following link to the DHS Web site for more options

<http://www.flu.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/acd/flu/printable-materials.shtml>

- Other tools (physical or electronic) that meet a business need not met by an existing tool

Future Actions

Additional messaging related to management of the state's workforce will depend on actual circumstances as they occur, the extent of the H1N1 pandemic within Oregon, and the degree to which state government is affected.

This plan contains three sample messages as outlined in the timeline (see Processes and Tools, page 2) and calls for additional messages. The conditions during flu season will dictate the content of the messages not yet developed. DAS will provide the messages to agencies throughout flu season as needed.

Future actions will align with the goals, core messages, strategies and processes contained in this plan.

Appendix A | Director's Message 1: Prepare

We rarely have the luxury of several weeks advance notice before an emergency occurs, but with a potentially bad flu season on the horizon, time is on our side.

This message is the first in a series that I will send to all staff to help our agency prepare. If we collectively take a few actions at home and at work, we will lower the odds of catching and transmitting the flu and help our agency remain open when our citizens need our services this fall and winter.

Current status of H1N1 flu

The World Health Organization declared a pandemic for the H1N1 flu (formerly called the "swine flu") in June 2009. The virus continues to spread worldwide. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) expect more cases as the regular flu season approaches.

Given the real possibility of widespread cases of H1N1, our agency will take a proactive approach to minimize the flu's effects on our ability to fulfill our core mission.

Preparing at home

Consider the following suggestions as you examine the needs of your family. This list is not exhaustive; use it as a starting point for personal planning.

- **Transportation.** Could the flu interrupt your transportation to work? What's the plan if you or your carpool buddy gets sick?
- **Childcare.** Account for various scenarios (you get sick, your child gets sick, your caregiver gets sick, etc.). Make a plan that works for you and your family.
- **Schools.** Stay in touch with your children's schools so you can understand their emergency procedures and the way they communicate with parents if an emergency occurs.
- **Caring for family and pets.** Who counts on you to check on them regularly? Parents? Aging relatives or neighbors? If you become sick and can't follow up with these people, who will serve as backup? Also consider the needs of pets.
- **Food.** Keep some easy meals on hand to feed your family in case the flu makes it difficult to get to the grocery store. Find out what delivery options exist through local grocery stores. Stock up on items to help a flu patient recover (for guidance, contact a healthcare professional).
- **Prescriptions.** Ensure you have a few extra days supply of critical prescriptions. Understand the emergency options at your pharmacy, and look into home delivery options.
- **Emergency contacts.** Ensure that family members know whom to call in a given situation. Update phone directories and cell phones.

Preparing at work

In all the divisions and units of our agency, supervisors will ensure that our business continuity plans contain appropriate documentation to cover all job functions.

The Public Employees' Benefit Board continues its annual flu shot campaign *for the seasonal flu*. A flu shot from a PEBB clinic, however, *does not protect against the H1N1 virus*. Health experts recommend that everyone get the seasonal flu shot. They also recommend getting the H1N1 vaccination as soon as it is available. For more on PEBB's seasonal flu-shot clinics for state employees, visit the Board's Web site: <http://oregon.gov/das/pebb>.

What's next

In early September, I'll share more information about how to avoid catching the flu and how to prevent its spread. I'll also update you on any new information we receive from DHS about the flu in Oregon. To answer HR

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questions, DAS will offer some tools to help employees and managers navigate various policies and practices as they relate to flu season.

I hope you will join me to prepare. A small investment of time now will ensure we're well-positioned this fall and winter.

[Insert Director's Signature Block]

Web resources

Oregon's main flu site: <http://www.flu.oregon.gov/>

Centers for Disease Control: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

Frequently Asked Questions: <http://oregon.gov/DAS/HR/flu.shtml>

Public Employees' Benefit Board: <http://oregon.gov/DAS/PEBB/flushots.shtml>

[Optional – insert agency-specific resources: employee ideas on preparedness; success stories re BCP; links; archive of director's messages, etc.]

Appendix B | Director's Message 2: Prevent

In mid-August, I suggested things to consider at home — ways to prepare for a potentially hard-hitting flu season. As I thought about the close link between my home and work life, I found several areas where I could prepare personally. If you missed that message or want to review it again, visit this link:

[Insert link to shared drive, intranet, etc.]

Current status of H1N1 flu

The World Health Organization continues to raise concerns about the H1N1 flu and urges us to step up hygiene and sanitary practices. Here are some actions we can all take to help curb the spread of both the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu.

Preventing the flu — Courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

The symptoms of the H1N1 flu virus in people are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu. They include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people infected with this virus also report diarrhea and vomiting.

- 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 this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick, stay home. Seek medical treatment when necessary.

Supervisors should ensure that employees in high traffic or public areas have a supply of tissues and hand cleaners available.

Oregon-OSHA and the Public Health Division do not recommend that the general public wear masks, since masks do not enhance protection against flu. To find out more about the official guidelines on wearing masks in work settings, see <http://www.cbs.state.or.us/osha/pdf/notices/fluguidelines.pdf>. If the guidelines change, we will notify you immediately.

Other actions

The Public Employees' Benefit Board continues its annual flu shot campaign *for the seasonal flu*. A flu shot from a PEBB clinic, however, *does not protect against the H1N1 virus*. Health experts recommend that everyone get the seasonal flu shot. They also recommend getting the H1N1 vaccination as soon as it is available. For more on PEBB's seasonal flu-shot clinics for state employees, visit the Board's Web site: <http://oregon.gov/das/pebb>.

What's next

Because state government delivers critical services to Oregonians, state offices will remain open and state employees will stay on the job in all but the most extreme circumstances. Every preparation we make now will help us meet our obligations and duties during the flu season. In early October, I will share more information about the state's overall approach to managing potential complications from the flu season, including applicable policies and the tools available to us.

If you have questions that relate to your specific work functions, please contact your immediate supervisor. Contact our Employee Services office, (503) xxx-xxxx with questions related to HR.

[Insert Director's Signature Block, Web resources and optional info from Message 1]

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Web resources

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Centers for Disease Control: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

Frequently Asked Questions: <http://oregon.gov/DAS/HR/flu.shtml>

Public Employees' Benefit Board: <http://oregon.gov/DAS/PEBB/flushots.shtml>

Appendix C | Director's Message 3: Stay Informed

[Insert an opening statement from the director based on feedback received from previous messages.]

If you missed my previous messages about preparing for flu season, or want to review them again, visit this link: *[insert link to shared drive, intranet, etc.]*

Current status of H1N1 flu *[To be provided — based on the latest information from WHO, CDC, DHS.]*

Stay informed

If an emergency occurs, people will need reliable information on which to base their decisions and actions. With today's multitude of resources, most people do not suffer from a lack of information. The question everyone faces is: What information is reliable? The answer is: It depends on the source.

In a recent meeting of state agency directors, we discussed the need for state government to coordinate its efforts during flu season, to "stay on the same page." The directors agreed we must only use official sources for information related to the flu.

HR. Contact our own Employee Services office on any time-keeping or procedure questions. As needed, Employee Services will elevate questions to DAS and get back to us with answers.

Prevention. DHS Public Health Division and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are the best authorities on how to prevent or recover from the flu.

Flu season worldwide. The World Health Organization continues to track the flu around the world — information we may need for personal or business travel or for meeting the needs of our agency's customers.

Insurance-covered services. PEBB is the official source to answer questions related to your healthcare benefits as a state employee. Watch for PEBB's monthly newsletters, special e-mail notices, and letters at home.

Closure of state buildings. DAS has the authority to close state buildings. As the director, I have authority to curtail our agency's operations if necessary. We will stay open to serve our customers unless the situation worsens to a hazardous level.

Look for and listen to official communications as you navigate various media.

Keep up the good work

I encourage you to continue good practices to prevent catching or spreading the flu: Cover your mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough (and throw the tissue away); wash your hands frequently with soap and water (or alcohol-based cleaners); and stay home if you become ill.

What's next

Despite our best efforts, some of us will likely catch the flu. Because of the *potential* for spreading the illness, I will immediately inform you of the specific HR practices that will come into play if a real outbreak occurs (e.g., simple procedures, such as whether you'll need a doctor's note to return to work if you catch the flu).

[Insert Director's Signature Block, Web resources and optional info from Message 1]

Web resources

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Appendix D | Template for Additional Messaging

For Statewide or Agency-specific Messages

Connect

Point out previous topics and introduce the current topic.

Describe

Give the status of the situation — who, what, when, where.

Explain

Outline actions to take or actions taken — who, what, when, where.

Encourage

Clarify the reasons and point out resources — why, how.

Appendix E | Sample Poster

For more options, visit <http://www.flu.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/acd/flu/printable-materials.shtml>.

DHS: PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION



- **Get a flu shot**
- **Cover your cough**
- **Wash your hands**
- **Stay home when you're sick**

 | Independent. Healthy. Safe.