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## **H1N1: Tips for businesses and employers**

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As the busy holiday season begins, Oregon Public Health officials are reminding employers of things they can do to protect their employees, customers and businesses during the H1N1 pandemic.

"It's important that employers find ways to stop the spread of pandemic H1N1 flu at their places of business. The first step is prevention," says Mel Kohn, M.D., M.P.H., Oregon public health director.

Businesses can start by taking the following steps to prevent the spread of flu virus:

- Encourage employees to wash their hands, cover their coughs with something other than their hands and get vaccinated as soon as possible.
- Provide customers with hand sanitizers, tissues and trash receptacles.
- Discourage employees from using others' phones, desks, offices or other work tools and equipment.
- Frequently disinfect work surfaces, telephones, computers and other office equipment.
- Promote healthy lifestyles including smoking cessation, good nutrition and exercise.
- Have sick leave policies that allow employees to stay home and not spread the virus.

"One of the most crucial things people need to do to stop the spread of flu is to stay home when they first get symptoms, particularly a fever," says Kohn. "That may cause a short-term hardship for a business, but it's easier to stop the spread of

flu in the workplace than replace multiple employees who are out for more than a week.”

Businesses can plan ahead by making sure all employees know the sick leave policies and when it’s safe to return to work after having the flu. Employers who can’t offer sick leave can find creative ways to allow employees to make up lost time such as flexible scheduling or working from home.

“Dedicated workers and employers sometimes have trouble missing work,” says Kohn. “They need to know it’s okay to stay home when they’re sick.”

Employers can plan ahead for flu absences by cross-training employees, compiling a current list of backup workers, and determining the minimum amount of work that will be required to keep the business running.

“By working together, we can keep Oregon’s business and industry going strong through the flu season,” says Kohn.

For more information and a helpful business tool kit, visit [www.flu.oregon.gov](http://www.flu.oregon.gov) or call the Oregon Public Health flu hotline at 1-800-978-3040.

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