

# ISSUE BRIEF

2009



## Preparing for H1N1 "Swine" Flu

### **What is Pandemic H1N1?**

Pandemic H1N1 influenza (once referred to as "swine flu") is a flu virus that causes respiratory illness in people. Because H1N1 is a new flu virus, few people have immunity to it.

In June 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that an H1N1 pandemic was underway, meaning this infectious disease is spreading among people throughout the world.

Pandemic H1N1 has been similar in severity to usual strains of influenza. However since few people have immunity to the new virus, more people may get sick. Organizations are concerned that the flu may disrupt normal operations.

H1N1 influenza is currently circulating in Oregon. Officials say that certain groups, including pregnant women and people with underlying health conditions, are at increased risk of complications with H1N1 influenza.

### **What are the symptoms of H1N1?**

Pandemic H1N1 flu symptoms are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, runny or stuffy nose, headache, nausea, diarrhea, chills and fatigue.

### **How can H1N1 be prevented?**

Pandemic H1N1 spreads the same way seasonal flu viruses do, mainly from person-to-person through coughing and sneezing. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something (such as a surface or

object) with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Prevention efforts such as washing hands and staying home when sick will assist greatly in stopping the spread of H1N1, seasonal flu, and the common cold.

The regular seasonal flu shot does not protect against the H1N1 flu virus. An additional flu vaccine will be available in October to protect individuals from the H1N1 flu. People are encouraged to get their seasonal flu shot now and get the H1N1 vaccine when it is available.

### **What is OYA doing about H1N1?**

OYA is focusing on prevention to keep flu out of OYA facilities, offices, foster care and residential placements.

In general the following are steps any person can do to reduce the risk of getting infected or infecting others:

- Wash your hands often, especially before touching your eyes, nose or mouth, and after you cough or sneeze
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or into your sleeve, not into your bare hand – and place the used tissue in the trash – then wash your hands
- Avoid shaking hands
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- Keep your distance (at least 6 feet) from somebody who appears sick with influenza symptoms

OYA is emphasizing the importance of good hand washing with offenders and staff because that is the single most effective thing a person can do to reduce their risk of catching H1N1 flu until a vaccine is available.

OYA is providing hand sanitizer and tissues in central locations throughout offices and facilities. Staff and offenders are being instructed in proper hygiene methods.

Protecting each other is an important community responsibility. OYA asks staff and visitors to stay away from facilities and offices if they are ill with flu symptoms because of the threat to the health of incarcerated offenders and staff.

OYA recommends that all staff and offenders get the seasonal flu vaccine that is currently available and that they get the H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available. Both vaccines are important to provide protection against the two types of flu that are currently circulating.

Offenders entering facilities through intake units will be screened for illness by OYA Health Services staff.

### **What if the flu strikes OYA?**

If H1N1 flu does enter an OYA facility, OYA is prepared to treat infections and to take additional measures to reduce the chances of spread within the units and between units. Medical isolation areas have been identified in every facility to care for youth and reduce the likelihood of transmission.

Unless there is a significant outbreak of flu in a facility or so many staff are ill that visiting cannot be accommodated, offender visits will continue as usual. Potential visitors are asked to stay away from facilities if they have any of the following signs and symptoms of flu:

- Fever over 100 degrees
- Feeling feverish or having chills without taking your temperature
- Recent onset of cough or sore throat
- Vomiting or diarrhea in the previous 24 hours

OYA created a Web page dedicated to flu information: [www.oregon.gov/oia/flu.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/oia/flu.shtml). Potential visitors will be able to check the Web site for information and to see if a facility is open for visiting.

OYA is continuously evaluating its infection control measures and keeping current with recommendations from the Oregon Department of Human Services and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to be sure it is doing all it can to protect the health of OYA staff and offenders. ◀



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