

Date: April 30, 2009

To: All OPSEU Local Presidents or Highest-Ranking Officers, all OPSEU members of Joint Health and Safety Committees and Health and Safety Representatives

From: OPSEU Health and Safety Committee

Re: Swine Flu outbreak: Guidance for Joint Health and Safety Committees and Health and Safety Representatives

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Sisters and Brothers:

As you know, there is a Swine Flu outbreak in Ontario and other provinces, as well as in a number of countries around the world. OPSEU is monitoring the situation carefully and regularly posting updates on our website as well as providing links to other sites for more detailed information.

The World Health Organization (WHO) this week upgraded its Influenza Alert from Phase 4 to Phase 5, indicating that there is now evidence of human-to-human transmission of this novel influenza virus in at least two countries. WHO is advising that all countries activate their pandemic preparedness plans.

Ontario has not yet declared an emergency or raised its level of vigilance beyond “Enhanced.” A pandemic has not yet been declared. However, OPSEU believes it is prudent and important for Joint Health and Safety Committees in all of our workplaces to convene urgent meetings to review their pandemic influenza plans to ensure that the plans are current and ready for implementation. Health and Safety Representatives in smaller workplaces (with more than 5 and fewer than 20 workers) should request to meet with their employers as well, to review their pandemic plans. In some workplaces, these plans will be referred to as emergency preparedness plans.

OPSEU workplaces vary greatly – some members deal with the public, some have no public interaction, some work in healthcare or other residential facilities where they may have to care for ill patients, residents or clients. Some of our members can work from home while others must come to the workplace daily. Accordingly, the requirements of each pandemic plan will differ according to workplace requirements, nature of work and interaction with the public.

Areas to consider when reviewing your pandemic (or emergency) plan:

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- Is there a written plan that is easily accessed by all employees?
- Have all employees received education on the plan and demonstrated they understand it?
- Do all employees know where they can get more information about how the plan applies to them? For example, if the employer, in consultation with the JHSC determines that new measures should be taken to prevent the transmission of influenza, how will that information be communicated and who will the employees ask for clarification?
- Has someone in the workplace been designated to monitor the status of the outbreak around the province and to communicate relevant information with employees?
- If employees regularly work with the public, are precautions in place to ensure that employees are not exposed to potentially infectious people? The following measures may be needed depending on the workplace: screening (either self-screening or by employees) of potentially infectious people, glass or plexiglass barriers separating employees and public, separation of 3 meters or more between workers and potentially infectious people, available hand sanitizer for workers and public, personal protective equipment if employees must be in close contact with potentially infectious people.
- If there is a requirement for personal protective equipment such as N-95 respirators, gloves, gowns and face shields, are adequate supplies in stock and do employees know how to access them?
- If N-95 respirators are required, have employees been fit-tested in the past two years?
- If staffing numbers are reduced because of employee illness, are plans in place to address staff shortages which will not endanger worker health and safety or violate the collective agreement?
- Has the employer advised all employees to stay at home if they are ill and potentially contagious? Specifically, has the employer advised that Attendance Awareness programs will not be applied if employees are suffering from Swine Flu and miss work?

Please ensure that your OPSEU members of JHSCs or Health and Safety Representatives in smaller workplaces receive this memo. Advise them to request their employer to convene an emergency JHSC meeting. Advise them that OPSEU is regularly updating the Swine Flu information on its website. And advise them that if they have questions and concerns that they can't address internally at their workplace, to call or email OPSEU's Health and Safety Unit at Head Office.