

Swine Flu: 7 Keys for Managers to Keep Your Company Functioning

By Lynda Goldman

"The Swine Flu appears to be a milder variant, but it can potentially slow the economy," says Dr. Ashok Oommen, MD, CM, CCFP-EM, Faculty Lecturer at McGill University, Emergency Specialist, Family Doctor, and specialist in Preventive Medicine as Medical Director at Cardiogenix Medical Centre.

The current HINI virus is a subclass of influenza type A, but seems to be weaker and more limited. It probably won't kill many people, but it does have the potential to reach pandemic proportions, and potentially spread far and wide.

Unlike the typical flu that attacks young children and people over 65, there is something about this strain that attacks young healthy adults in their 20s to 40s, so prevention is vital.

Dr. Oommen says that everyone needs to practice basic flu prevention. He offers these 7 keys for keeping a workforce functioning and healthy.

1. **Stop handshaking and kissing** in the workplace, especially if someone has a cold, or flu-like symptoms. A sneeze can have up to 6000 respiratory droplets that can fly 6 feet. People can inhale these droplets into their lungs. After shaking hands, be sure not to touch your face, because the hands transmit the virus to the mouth. If someone doesn't shake hands with you, don't be offended.
If you sneeze, be sure to sneeze into your sleeve or a tissue, not into your hands. If you aren't feeling well, don't shake hands with anyone.
2. **Wash your hands properly** for at least 20 seconds. Dr. Oommen suggests you sing Happy Birthday or recite the ABCs twice to make sure you wash for enough time. Carry a hand sanitizer such as Purell, for times when you can't wash your hands. But when your hands are dirty, soap and water are the gold standards.
3. **Help employees practice prevention.** Managers should give employees leeway to stay home if they have flu-like symptoms, or if their children have them. If you have a daycare center on your premises, encourage the daycare workers to increase their vigilance, and have children wash their hands at least 6 times per day.
4. **Be careful of what you touch.** This flu strain is hardy and resistant to breakdown. It can live on surfaces such as doorknobs, keyboards and pens for at least two hours. Use your own pen, keyboard, and phone whenever possible. Wash your hands frequently after touching surfaces such as doorknobs.

Be especially vigilant in common areas, such as office kitchens and washrooms. Bring your own coffee mug and keep it with you. Don't

leave it in the drainer for other people to use, or use mugs that are left there. Use the dishwasher if it's available.

5. **Ventilate buildings.** Allow fresh air to circulate, especially in areas where people work in cubicles. For people who work in close quarters, consider distributing the N95 mask that stops viral infiltration.

At meetings, suggest that people omit handshaking hands for now. And make sure that the rooms are well ventilated.

6. **Continue business travel.** There is no restriction on travel, except to Mexico. In fact the circulation in airplanes is often better than in office towers. However, you may want to wear a face mask. The N95 is the only mask that stops viral infiltration.

7. **Boost your immune system.** This is the time to use healthy practices, such as eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, sleeping 7-8 hours per day, and exercising at least 3 times per week. Give your immune system a little extra boost by taking at least 1 gram of Vitamin C for the next six months. If you feel a cold starting, take 2 grams of Vitamin C the first day, and 1 gram per day after that.

Other immune boosters include 800 IU of Vitamin D and 800 mcg of Folate per day, usually found in multi-vitamins. Eat as many colors of fruits and vegetables a day as you can – aim for 7 colors per day.

Dr. Ashok Oommen, MD, CM, CCFP-EM

Dr. Ashok Oommen is a practicing emergency room physician at St. Mary's hospital, and one of the principles and owners of the Cardiogenix Private Medical Clinic, a state of the art facility for health and well being.

Dr. Oommen and his facility provide executive and corporate health programs, and seminars to companies and small groups. His programs include: The Sandwich Generation, Health is Wealth, 4 Billion Beats and Counting, and The Game of Life - Are You Winning It? For more information, please contact:

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