

Connecticut Department of Public Health
Interim Guidance for Influenza Illness Among Farm Workers (updated 8/5/2009)

The novel H1N1 influenza virus (swine flu) is a new type of influenza virus. While we are still learning about how this virus behaves, so far it appears that this virus acts like other influenza viruses in many ways. Influenza is passed from person-to-person in two ways: when someone sick with flu coughs or sneezes and someone nearby breathes in the air that has virus particles or someone touches a surface that has the virus on it and then touches their eyes, nose or mouth. Persons living close together, such as dormitories or barracks, are at greater risk for catching this virus once it is in the area. This document is guidance for farm owners and farm workers for handling influenza-like illness in an area like Connecticut where the novel H1N1 flu is being passed around in the community.

Flu Prevention/Infection Control

Good hand hygiene and cough etiquette should be encouraged among all workers on the farm. Signs educating workers about hand washing should be placed in common areas and bathroom facilities throughout the farm. Adequate handwashing facilities, including running water and soap, should be made available to workers both in living areas and in work areas. If running water is not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be used. Signs are available in English, Spanish and other languages from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website. (<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/covercough.htm>)

Good hand hygiene includes the following:

Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. If soap is not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizer can be used.

Good cough etiquette includes the following:

Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your arm, elbow or shoulder, not your hands.

Throw away used tissue into the trash after each use.

Surveillance/Reporting of Illness

- Influenza-like illness is defined as fever (100° F) PLUS a cough or sore throat. People with influenza can have other symptoms including muscle aches, fatigue, weakness, nausea/vomiting, and diarrhea.
- A system for reporting of illness by workers should be set-up on every farm. Workers should know who to report to if they have symptoms and should know that they will not lose their jobs for doing so.
- Signs encouraging reporting of illness and how to do so should be posted in living and work areas on the farm.
- If a worker with influenza-like illness is identified on a farm, other workers that live or work with the ill person should be monitored daily for symptoms. (Workers should be asked about fever, cough and sore throat symptoms).
- If there are more than 3 people in the same living situation or working closely together during the day that develop symptoms within one week of each other, the local and state health departments should be notified. The health department will assist with appropriate infection control measures and arrange for laboratory testing, if necessary.

Care of an ill farm worker

For workers who report fever AND cough or sore throat, the following should be done:

- The ill person should be removed from work activities.
- The ill person should be isolated as much as possible from other workers.
- If the ill person lives away from the farm, they should be sent home with instructions for seeking medical care, if necessary, and instructions for caring for a sick person at home. (see attached)

- For those workers living on the farm, if possible, place the ill person in a private room. If workers live in barracks style housing, the ill person should be placed in a part of the room that can be sectioned off from the rest of the room. Ill persons should be placed at least 6 feet away from other workers sleeping in the same room.
- If there are adequate toilet/bathroom facilities, one should be dedicated to the ill person, if possible.
- **The ill person should not be allowed to return to work or travel outside of the farm, if boarding there, (except to seek medical care) until 24 hours after fever resolves, without the use of fever reducing medications.**
- One other worker should be assigned to monitoring the ill person's symptoms, bring them meals, and attend to their other needs. This worker should not be at increased risk for flu complications (see below). This worker should be monitoring for symptoms daily and given instructions for caring for a sick person. (see attached) These instructions include keeping at least 6 feet from the ill person (if possible) and wearing a mask if close contact is necessary. This worker should also wash their hands after any contact with the ill person or contact with contaminated materials (e.g. tissues, bed linens, etc).
- Ill persons should be isolated to their living area as much as possible. If they need to leave that area for medical care or other reasons, they should be provided with a surgical mask or tissues to cover their cough and sneezes.

Medical care should be sought if the ill person desires or if the ill person displays serious symptoms including:

- Trouble breathing
- Chest pain
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe/persistent vomiting
- Symptoms that improve but then worsen

Medical care should also be sought if the ill worker has a condition that puts them at higher risk for influenza complications including:

- Age \geq 65
- Pregnancy
- Chronic medical conditions (lung disease, such as asthma, emphysema or chronic bronchitis, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disease, blood disorders like sickle cell anemia, immune system problems (these include HIV/AIDS), diabetes, nervous system, or muscular disorders)

Information on where farm workers can seek medical attention can be found at:

<http://www.massleague.org/CRVFHP/English.htm> or by contacting the local health department.