

# H1N1 Small Business Plan



As flu season arrives, it is unknown how the H1N1 influenza outbreak will evolve, so it is best to be prepared for even the most severe circumstances. If there is a potentially serious outbreak this fall and winter, small businesses may be challenged with absenteeism, restricted services and supply chain disruptions. The nation depends on small businesses, and it is imperative that they remain as operational as possible. If businesses are prepared, they will be able to better cope with whatever situation in which they are faced. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security recommends crafting a written H1N1 business plan, and has offered the following tips.

## How to Write Your Plan

As a small business owner or employee, you do not want to be caught unprepared when the flu season hits. Regardless of the size or type of your business, a bit of planning now can put strategies into place that will help protect the business and its employees when the 2009 H1N1 flu arrives. Plan now for the return of the 2009 H1N1 flu to your community and for the potential for a more serious outbreak. It is important that the following list of recommendations be reviewed carefully and applied in the most appropriate way to your small business.

1. Identify a workplace coordinator who will be responsible for dealing with 2009 H1N1 flu issues and their impact at the workplace, including contacting local health department and health care providers in advance, and developing and implementing protocols for response to ill individuals. The coordinator should not wait for flu season to start in order to establish those contacts and relationships, and should check online resources of local public health officials immediately to learn what you should be doing.
2. Examine policies for leave, telework, and employee compensation and review with all employees so they are up-to-date on sick leave policies and employee assistance programs. Leave policies should be flexible, non-punitive and well-communicated. They should allow workers who have the flu to stay home and away from co-workers. Also, plan to have workers stay home if they have to care for sick family members. Be prepared, in the event that there are school closures, to allow workers flexible schedules or accommodations so they can mind their children and keep them safe at home. Explore the possibility of some of your workers working from home with appropriate infrastructure support.
3. Determine who will be responsible for assisting ill individuals in the workplace, and make sure at least one person can serve as the "go-to" person if a worker becomes sick at the workplace.
4. Identify essential employees, essential business functions, and other critical inputs (i.e., raw materials, suppliers, subcontractor services/products and logistics) required to maintain business operations should there be disruptions during the 2009 H1N1 flu outbreak – and make plans on how to communicate with people that perform essential tasks to provide them assignments and work direction. Explore other ways you can continue business operations if there are supply chain or other disruptions.
5. Share your pandemic plans with employees and clearly communicate expectations. It is important to let your employees know your plans and expectations when 2009 H1N1 flu outbreaks occur in communities where you have a workplace. Consider ways to communicate with employees who do not speak English or with those who have disabilities.
6. Prepare business continuity plans so that if there is significant absenteeism or changes in the way you need to conduct business in the workplace during this outbreak, you can maintain operations. School dismissals and childcare provider closures may increase absenteeism in the workplace. Health officials may also advise that workplaces take multiple steps to increase the space between people and decrease the frequency of contact among people, also known as "social distancing," to reduce the spread of illness during a more severe outbreak.

7. Establish an emergency communications plan. This plan includes identification of key contacts (with back-ups), chain of communications (including suppliers and customers), and processes for tracking and communicating business and employee status.

### **Keeping Employees Healthy: 10 Tips for Businesses**

Employees are a crucial resource at any business, and especially small businesses. There are steps you can take now, and during the flu season, to help protect the health of your employees.

1. Develop policies that encourage ill workers to stay at home without fear of any reprisals.
2. Develop other flexible policies to allow workers to telework (if feasible) and create other leave policies to allow workers to stay home to care for sick family members or care for children if schools close.
3. Provide resources and a work environment that promotes personal hygiene. For example, provide tissues, no-touch trash cans, hand soap, hand sanitizer, disinfectants and disposable towels for workers to clean their work surfaces.
4. Provide education and training materials in an easy-to-understand format and in the appropriate language and literacy levels for all employees. See [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business).
5. Instruct employees who are well but have an ill family member at home with the flu that they can go to work as usual. These employees should monitor their health every day, and notify their supervisor and stay home if they become ill. Employees who have a certain underlying medical condition or who are pregnant should promptly call their health care provider for advice if they become ill.
6. Encourage workers to obtain a seasonal influenza vaccine, if it is appropriate for them according to CDC recommendations ([www.cdc.gov/flu/prottext/keyfacts.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/prottext/keyfacts.htm)). This helps to prevent illness from seasonal influenza strains that may circulate at the same time as the 2009 H1N1 flu.
7. Encourage employees to get the 2009 H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available if they are in a priority group according to CDC recommendations. For information on groups recommended for seasonal and H1N1 vaccines, please visit [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov). Consider granting employees time off from work to get vaccinated when the vaccine is available in your community.
8. Provide workers with up-to-date information on influenza risk factors, protective behaviors, and instruction on proper behaviors (for example: cough etiquette; avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth; and hand hygiene).
9. Plan to implement practices to minimize face-to-face contact between workers if advised by the local health department. Consider the use of such strategies as extended use of e-mail, Web sites and teleconferences. Also consider implementing flexible work arrangements (for example, telecommuting or flexible work hours) to reduce the number of workers who must be at the work site at the same time or in one specific location.
10. If an employee does become sick while at work, place the employee in a separate room or area until he/she can go home, away from other workers. If the employee needs to go into a common area prior to leaving, he or she should cover coughs/sneezes with a tissue or wear a facemask if available and tolerable. Ask the employee to go home as soon as possible.

Repurposed from *The Homeland Security's Planning for 2009 H1N1 Influenza: A Preparedness Guide for Small Businesses*.

*This article is not intended to be exhaustive nor should any discussion or opinions be construed as legal advice. Readers should contact legal counsel for legal advice.*