

What Employers/Enterprises Should Know about Influenza Preparedness

AS AN OWNER OF AN ENTERPRISE OR AN EMPLOYER

(A) Acquire an understanding of influenza/avian influenza/influenza pandemic to plan and act accordingly

- ◆ INFLUENZA or 'flu' can be caused by different types of influenza viruses. It is important to differentiate the three different entities of seasonal influenza, avian influenza and influenza pandemic. Influenza spreads mainly by respiratory droplets generated by coughing and sneezing or contact with contaminated surfaces.
- ◆ SEASONAL INFLUENZA occurs in human populations. In Hong Kong, influenza peaks appear in January to March and July to August every year. Circulating strains are commonly influenza A (H1N1 and H3N2) and influenza B.
- ◆ AVIAN INFLUENZA normally infects birds, including poultry. Possible strains include influenza A (H5, H7 and H9) viruses. Human cases of avian influenza have been reported, mostly resulting from close contact with sick birds or patients with avian influenza. Efficient spread between human beings is not known.
- ◆ INFLUENZA PANDEMIC occurs when a new viral strain emerges and spreads rapidly among the human race which does not possess immunity to the disease. The new viral strain could come from a human influenza virus or an avian influenza virus. As large numbers of people will fall ill or die from it, great human, social and economic loss will result. Many people would be unable to work due to sickness, having to stay home to care for the sick, or upon Government advice to reduce social contact. Community and economic activities will have to be scaled down.
- ◆ According to the World Health Organization, the incubation period for avian influenza H5N1 is 7 days. After being infected, persons may develop symptoms in seven days, but they may start spreading the disease one day before symptoms develop.
- ◆ The initial clinical presentation of avian influenza is like other types of influenza, which may include fever, cough, sore throat, headache and muscle ache. However, avian influenza is more often associated with a history of travel to a place with affected poultry and/or contact with sick birds, avian influenza patients or related laboratory specimens. Some avian flu patients may also

present with shortness of breath and diarrhoea. Avian flu may progress to develop high fever, chest infection, lung failure, multi-organ failure and death.

(B) Take appropriate steps to ensure maximum protection of your staff and business

- ◆ Ensure a clean and hygienic work environment through regular disinfection of office equipment, door knobs and lift buttons with 1:99 diluted household bleach; cleaning of carpets, doors and windows; proper maintenance of toilet facilities and floor drains including adequate supply of liquid soap, disposable towels or hand-dryers. At the same time, good ventilation including opening windows as many as possible and/or well-maintained air conditioning system with adequate ventilation such as switching on exhaust fans, should be observed.
- ◆ Promote healthy lifestyle and encourage the uptake of influenza vaccination against seasonal flu by high risk individuals.
- ◆ Support staff in adopting good personal (e.g. frequent hand-washing) and environmental hygiene (e.g. provision of liquid soap, lidded rubbish bin and regular refuse disposal).
- ◆ Consume only thoroughly cooked poultry and eggs.
- ◆ Relieve staff members from work if they are sick and offer surgical masks to staff with any symptoms which might be related to flu while they arrange to see a doctor.
- ◆ Keep a clear staff sick leave record.
- ◆ Take heed of travel advice and timely information about the local and global situation and control measures of various types of flu (from Government website: www.chp.gov.hk and public announcement) for staff or business partners.
- ◆ Study the Hong Kong Government influenza pandemic emergency response plan (www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/checklist-e_flu_eng_20051105.pdf) and develop in-house supplies of protective equipment and plans for staff deployment/roster and operational plans for core services in accordance with various levels of activation.

(C) If a member of the staff develops avian influenza

- ◆ Cooperate with the Department of Health (DH) in case investigation and contact tracing (both social and close contacts) by providing details of co-workers and clients who have contact with the index patient, the workflow of the staff concerned, the floor plan of the workplace; arranging interviews with

staff/clients; facilitating visits to the workplace; supplying staff sick leave records and any other actions considered appropriate to help understand how the disease has been acquired, how far it has spread and what measures are needed to contain it.

- ◆ Cooperate and comply with DH regarding instructions on closure of workplace; suspension of workflow; disinfection of workplace with 1:49 diluted household bleach; assisting in the follow up of health status of the workforce. Advise and facilitate any staff who develop influenza-like symptoms to consult doctors as soon as possible and take any other measures considered necessary.
- ◆ Sick staff should not be allowed to work, nor should staff requiring camp/home confinement be allowed to do so. Be sure to comply with the health advice and instructions issued by the Government.
- ◆ Strictly observe and monitor workplace precautionary measures for maximal staff protection as in (B) above.

(D) If the family of a staff member develops avian influenza

- ◆ Accept sick leave certificates with the diagnosis of “under medical surveillance” issued by DH to the staff whose family members suffer from avian flu as the staff may require camp/home confinement and medical surveillance.
- ◆ Strictly observe workplace precautionary measures for maximal staff protection as in (B) above.

(E) Consider business continuity planning for influenza pandemic

- ◆ Each company should formulate its preparedness plans. To maintain core operations/services, companies should take into consideration the following - identification of personnel for designated essential services, preparation of a staff roster plan, split of working groups into smaller groups, designation of deputies of the management, specifications of the responsibilities of key individual team management, conduct of contingency/redeployment plans exercises/drills, cultivation of better understanding of infection control measures and establishment of stockpile of personal protective equipment.

(F) 8 Steps to protect yourself against a pandemic

Step 1: Be prepared	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adopt a healthy lifestyle ● Ensure an adequate supply of the
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	<p>following items in the workplace:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ masks ➤ antipyretics ➤ thermometer ➤ liquid soap ➤ tissue paper
Step 2: Get vaccinated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Receive influenza vaccine according to the doctor's advice
Step 3: Keep hands clean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frequent and proper handwashing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ before touching eyes, mouth and nose ➤ when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretion, e.g. after coughing or sneezing ➤ after touching public installations or equipment ➤ before handling food or eating ➤ after going to toilet ➤ before putting on a mask, and before and after taking one off
Step 4: Use mask properly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wear a mask when respiratory symptoms develop
Step 5: Know how influenza presents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Symptoms include fever, headache, cough, runny nose, sore throat and muscle ache. History of contact with sick birds, avian flu patients and their excreta/secretions will help the doctor make the correct diagnosis
Step 6: Manage fever well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If you get fever <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ maintain good indoor ventilation ➤ drink plenty of water ➤ stay at home ➤ check body temperature regularly ➤ consult a doctor if symptoms persist or get worse
Step 7: Practise healthy lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Eat a balanced diet ● Exercise regularly ● Do not smoke ● Have adequate rest

Step 8: Be resourceful	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Know about health care resources in your neighbourhood● Keep yourself well-informed of latest situation and Government's announcement
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For more information on preventing influenza/avian influenza/influenza pandemic

Centre for Health Protection website – Influenza Page :
www.chp.gov.hk/view_content.asp?lang=en&info_id=590

Avian Flu website : www.info.gov.hk/info/flu/eng/

24-Hour Health Education Hotline of the Department of Health : 2833 0111

Department of Health
March 2006