

# 10 Steps Physicians can Take:

## Actions for H1N1 Influenza Planning and Response for Medical Offices and Outpatient Facilities

Medical offices and other outpatient facilities (e.g., outpatient/ambulatory clinics, outpatient surgery centers, urgent care centers, physical therapy/rehabilitation offices or clinics) that provide routine, episodic, and/or chronic healthcare services must be able to manage an increased demand for services in the midst of an H1N1 influenza outbreak.

- 1. Develop a Business Continuity Plan** — Novel H1N1 flu outbreaks will impact your organization, employees, suppliers of critical material, and your family. Identify your office/clinic's essential functions and the individuals who perform them. Make sure you have trained enough people to work in these essential functions and allow for absenteeism. Develop a plan that will sustain your core business activities for several weeks. Make alternate plans for critical supplies in case your supply chain is disrupted. For information about planning, see <http://www.ready.gov/business/plan/index.html>.
- 2. Inform employees about your plan for coping with additional surge during pandemic** — Provide clear and frequent communication to ensure that your staff is aware and understands the plan. Explain any policies and procedures that will be used to protect staff and your patients, and to manage a surge of patients. Advise your employees have a pandemic family plan or personal plans.
- 3. Plan to operate your facility if there is significant staff absenteeism** — Are you ready for 20% to 40% of your employees not being able to come to work? Cross training your staff is key to resilience. What else can be done to ensure continuity of operations with reduced staff?
- 4. Protect your workplace by asking sick employees to stay home** — All personnel should self monitor daily for signs and symptoms of febrile respiratory illness. Staff members who develop these symptoms should be instructed not to report to work, or if at work, should cease patient care activities and notify their supervisor. Be sure to align your sick leave policies so ill staff can stay home.
- 5. Plan for a surge of patients and increased demands for your services** — Consider using your telephone system to deliver messages to incoming callers about when to seek medical care at your facility, when to seek emergency care, and where to go for information about caring for a person with flu at home. Consider extending your hours of operation to include telephone triage of patients during a community outbreak.
- 6. Care for patients with H1N1 flu in your facility** — Plan to screen patients for signs and symptoms of febrile respiratory illness at entry to the facility. If feasible, use separate waiting and exam rooms for possible H1N1 flu patients; offer surgical masks to symptomatic patients who are able to wear them (adult and pediatric sizes should be available); and provide facial tissues, receptacles for their disposal, and hand hygiene products in waiting areas and exam rooms.
- 7. Take steps to protect the health of your workforce during an outbreak of H1N1** — All healthcare personnel who come in close contact with patients who may have H1N1 flu should use respiratory and eye protection for all patient care activities. Plan now to stockpile sufficient personal protective equipment for your staff.
- 8. Provide immunization against seasonal flu at no cost to your staff** — In the fall several influenza strains may be circulating at the same time. Although seasonal flu immunization will not protect from H1N1 influenza, annual influenza vaccination is recommended for healthcare professionals and likely will protect against seasonal influenza strains.
- 9. Know about pandemic planning and response activities of the hospitals, outpatient facilities and local public health in your community** — Seek information from and coordinate with key medical, clinical facilities and public health departments in your community to learn about how they will manage patients during a pandemic. Medical offices, emergency rooms, urgent care centers, and hospitals in communities with outbreaks likely will have difficulty managing a large influx of patients; a coordinated community response is important to manage surge

and ensure optimal patient care. Develop a plan to manage your patients who do not need to seek emergency services.

**10. Plan now so you will know where to turn to for reliable, up-to-date information in your community —**

For the latest information, monitor the CDC H1N1 Flu website at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>, the Texas Department of State Health Services at <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/txflu/default.shtm> and the Dallas County Health Department at [http://www.dallascounty.org/department/hhservices/hhs\\_intro.html](http://www.dallascounty.org/department/hhservices/hhs_intro.html).

Be prepared for a range of situations. The true impact of novel H1N1 flu outbreaks in the coming months will not be known until it happens. Be prepared for a possibility that your facility will have significant increased demand for services and that the fall outbreak may have greater impact than the outbreak in the spring 2009.

For more information, sign up to receive regular updates about H1N1 influenza, emerging infectious diseases, and other emergency preparedness and response information by going to <http://www.emergency.cdc.gov/clinregistry>.

--source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/10steps.htm>