

LESSONS FROM SWINE FLU (H1N1)

The virus outbreak began calmly and then quickly became a problem due to rapid transmission among the susceptible, the CDC's ineptness, and an inadequate supply of the vaccine. Risk managers need to prepare for the worst.

Risk Magazine suggests four key factors:

- 1. Having a plan is not enough.** You should have been assessing your company's response to the outbreak last spring. Putting structure behind the evaluation process will almost certainly reveal insights you can use. Make sure your plan is flexible and accommodates changes.
- 2. Employees will rely on their employers for assistance.** Clear, straightforward information is essential for allaying fears and building trust. Your communications should emphasize mitigation measures that your employees can control, such as personal hygiene and staying home.
- 3. This pandemic is especially worrisome to the business community.** While the regular flu impacts the elderly, swine flu disproportionately affects younger people which is likely to cause a greater strain on the workforce. Categorize employees into four groups (this is basic to a contingency plan):
 - Essential to the work site.
 - Essential, but can work remotely.
 - Nonessential, but can work remotely.
 - Nonessential and not necessary to work remotely.

4. Certain groups are at greater risk.

These folks have pre-existing medical conditions, such as diabetes, asthma, etc. The Human Resources department must be involved in the preparatory planning process because of HIPAA, and other employment laws. If they are available, some companies create a stockpile of antiviral medications, but this approach also has some risks and should be considered carefully.

Companies need to be prepared when potentially a third of their employees may not be available to work. It is a good idea to begin immediately to cross-train employees on essential functions, no matter what disaster may occur. It is no different from being prepared for a fire or tornado. Those disasters damage property, H1N1 damages people.

