



## Transmit safety, not flu

Provided by Mike Felix  
Association Coordinator

### Contagious virus can wreak havoc on the workplace

Whether it is a common strain or this year's expected H1N1 virus, the flu bug can sweep through your workplace infecting employees and causing lost time. In fact, in an average year, 36,000 Americans die from the influenza virus.

Often, employers don't consider illnesses like the flu as workers' compensation related, but in the grand scheme of lost time and of keeping workers safe and well, having a plan to prevent contagious diseases is as important as fighting against slips, trips and falls.

There's still time to make workplaces safer, before the flu hits.

Dr. Robert England, head of Maricopa County Public Health, says current predictions show that at least one in four will get sick this flu season, as the virus spreads. Much of that person-to-person passing will be in the workplace.

Debbie McCune, program director of the Arizona Partnership for Immunization, says employers could expect to see as much as 20 percent of their employees out at one time. This is why businesses need to get ready for the flu season.

Small businesses can do these things immediately:

- **Stress personal hygiene.** – The flu virus spreads through the air or on surfaces such as door knobs, phone handsets or keyboards. Prevention can be as simple as thoroughly washing one's hands with soap and water or using an antibacterial antiseptic hand gel. Workers should use tissues for sneezing or coughing; when they not available, use inner elbows or shirtsleeves to confine a sneeze or cough. Hang hygiene posters in key areas and discuss the importance of these strategies.
- **Urge workers and their families to get flu shots.** – The available vaccine guards against the regular flu, which protects those who are susceptible. A second shot to prevent the spread of H1N1 may not be as readily available, but initial batches should be ready in October. Most health insurances will cover the cost of the shots. Consider scheduling a flu shot clinic at work for employees' convenience.
- **Update your workers regularly about the flu.** – Stay abreast of news and information regarding the flu and communicate with your workers.

**Plan for absenteeism.** – Create a plan on how to cover workers. The Centers for Disease Control and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration urge employers to allow workers to stay home if they become ill, or even if family members are, so they are not coming to work and spreading the virus to others.

*If you would like more information on workplace safety please contact your SCF Association Coordinator.*

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