

Fact Sheet: Influenza (H1N1 and Seasonal) for Food Service Establishments

What is influenza?

Influenza, also known as “the flu”, is an illness caused by viruses that mainly affect the respiratory tract. Influenza is spread through inhalation or by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching the eyes, nose or mouth. Influenza viruses are not spread by eating food. Preparing, cooking or consuming pork is not associated with any influenza virus, including the H1N1 or “swine” flu.

Common symptoms of influenza include fever, (usually over 100 F), cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headaches and muscle aches, extreme fatigue, and possibly vomiting or diarrhea.

Those at highest risk of infection live in densely populated areas, are in crowded living situations, or attend school. Transmission of influenza virus in a restaurant could occur through the normal routes of infection that could happen in any public or private setting.

Food service establishments should:

- Closely monitor employee health
- Reinforce personal hygiene

The Food Code states that food service employees should not work if they are experiencing ANY of the following symptoms:

- Persistent sneezing, coughing or runny nose
- Discharges from the eyes, nose or mouth
- Sore throat with a fever
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

Employees who were sick can return to work IF:

- They are free of all symptoms for at least 24 hours, including being free of a fever for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication.

Influenza virus can survive:

- 24-48 hours on stainless steel and plastic
- 8-12 hours on cloth, paper and tissues
- 5 minutes on hands

Ensure the products you will be using to sanitize hard surfaces in bathrooms, door handles, etc. are registered with the EPA for use against influenza virus. See <http://www.epa.gov/oppad001/influenza-a-product-list.pdf> for details. Please note that some of the items on this list may not be approved for use on food contact surfaces such as utensils. Always follow chemical label directions for proper use.

Specific actions to consider:

- Instruct employees to wash hands frequently, especially after coughing, sneezing, using a tissue, or using the restroom.
- Encourage employees to be vaccinated against both seasonal flu **and** H1N1.
- Consider providing alcohol based hand sanitizer in public areas for guests, such as on buffet lines or self service area.
- Keep an uncovered wastebasket near the door to your restrooms so that employees and guests can use a paper towel to open the restroom door.
- Keep paper towels in your restrooms if your facility uses hand dryers as your method of hand drying.
- Switch out buffet utensils more frequently.
- Consider having an employee serve guests on the buffet line to minimize the contamination of utensils by guests.
- Pay extra attention to employee health and hygiene. Be on the lookout for sick staff and keep them out of work for 24 hours after symptoms stop.
- Pay extra attention to the cleaning and sanitizing of commonly touched items, including door handles, menus, bathroom fixtures, condiment bottles and salt and pepper shakers.

For local flu information, please go to <http://www.ewashtenaw.org/flu>

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self -diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Public Health at 734-544-6700.

