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To: **Nursing Homes**

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Novel Influenza A (H1N1) / 2009
Considerations for Emergency Preparedness / Disaster Planning for Pandemic Influenza

This Division of Quality Assurance (DQA) memo expands upon information already provided in DQA Memo 09-018 Novel Influenza A (H1N1) / 2009 (Swine Flu)

The purpose of this memo is to:

- Provide information about the significance of Novel Influenza A (H1N1) / 2009
- Explain the need for providers to prepare for pandemic influenza, identify what they need to do to be prepared and explain how they can go about developing and implementing a pandemic influenza preparedness plan
- Provide infection control guidance for the care of residents with confirmed or suspected Novel Influenza A (H1N1) / 2009

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a pandemic is a global disease outbreak. A flu pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which people have little or no immunity and for which there is no vaccine. The disease spreads easily person-to-person, causes serious illness, and can sweep across the country and around the world in a very short time.

In April 2009, a new influenza virus identified as Novel Influenza A (H1N1) / 2009 was first detected in the United States. On April 26, 2009, the United States (US) Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) declared that a public health emergency exists nationwide due to the increasing numbers of confirmed or suspected cases of this new virus. On April 30, 2009, Governor Jim Doyle declared a public health emergency in Wisconsin in response to the presence of H1N1 influenza in the state. On May 2, 2009, the State of Wisconsin, Department of Health Services (DHS) announced three confirmed cases of H1N1 influenza in Wisconsin.

Currently, there are increasing numbers of confirmed cases of human infection with this virus in Wisconsin, the United States and throughout the world. Health professionals are concerned about the possibility that this new virus could become a pandemic for the following reasons:

- It is a never-before seen combination of human, swine, and avian influenza viruses for which people have no immunity and there is no vaccine available to protect humans against this virus.
- It is being spread from person to person.
- The age group most affected is healthy, young adults (unlike seasonal flu)
- Like other influenza viruses, it continues to evolve.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed a system of six (6) levels of alerts for pandemic influenza. Level 1 indicates that there are no new influenza viruses in humans, although one may be present in animals with a low risk to humans. Level 6 indicates a full scale pandemic. As of June 11, 2009, the WHO set its pandemic alert at Level 6, which means all countries should be activating their pandemic preparedness plans.

Thus an influenza pandemic is occurring, and novel influenza has spread across populations in the world. In a pandemic, hospitals and other healthcare providers may be overwhelmed with massive numbers of acutely ill persons. Nursing homes will be impacted as they may not be able to transfer their residents to hospitals and may need to increase their current capacity to accommodate additional residents. Not only will residents be affected but it is expected that staff will be ill leading to widespread absenteeism severely impacting their ability to staff the nursing home causing shortages in services and supplies. Most disasters are time limited; a pandemic is expected to last for weeks and even months.

REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

Federal regulation 42 CFR 483.65 (Federal Tag 441) requires that the facility must establish and maintain an infection control program designed to provide a safe, sanitary, and comfortable environment and to help prevent the development of disease and infection.

HFS 132.82(3)(a) 1. Disaster Plan requires that each facility shall have a written procedure which shall be followed in case of fire **or other disasters**, and which shall specify persons to be notified, locations of alarm signals and fire extinguishers, evacuation routes, procedures for evacuating helpless residents, frequency of fire drills, and assignment of specific tasks and responsibilities to the personnel of each shift and each discipline.

PANDEMIC PLANNING

The above regulations are applicable to pandemic influenza. It is for these reasons that nursing homes need to ensure that they have an emergency preparedness / disaster plan for pandemic influenza. If your nursing home does not have a plan for pandemic influenza, the Division of Quality Assurance strongly recommends that you develop one now. The U.S. Department of Health and Human services has established a web site devoted to pandemic planning that includes planning checklists to assist providers in developing a plan and help identify what providers need to do to be prepared. This site is located at

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/index.html> If you have a plan, you should be reviewing and making plans to implement your plan by monitoring the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website located at <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu> and Wisconsin's Pandemic Flu website located at <http://pandemic.wisconsin.gov>

As with any potential disaster, preparations can be time consuming and expensive, and if the disaster does not occur for a prolonged period or when expected, there is a tendency to feel such preparation is wasted and unnecessary. However, adequate preparation and planning are essential to survive a major event like a pandemic influenza.

INFECTION CONTROL

Definition of Influenza-like Illness:

Influenza is a highly infectious viral respiratory disease. Influenza-like Illness (ILI) is defined as fever 100°F or higher **and** either a cough, nasal discharge or sore throat. Because fever may be difficult to determine in elderly residents, the definition of fever used for ILI may be defined as a temperature of 100°F or higher or 2 degrees above the established baseline for that resident.

Transmission:

According to the CDC, influenza is primarily transmitted from person-to-person via large virus-containing droplets that are expelled when infected persons cough or sneeze; these large droplets can then settle on the mucosal surfaces of the upper respiratory tracts of susceptible persons who are near (e.g., within about 6 feet) infected persons. Transmission may also occur through direct contact or indirect contact with respiratory secretions such as when touching surfaces contaminated with influenza virus and then touching the eyes, nose or mouth. Adults may be able to spread influenza to others from 1 day before getting symptoms to approximately 5 days after symptoms start. Children may be able to spread influenza to others as long as upper respiratory symptoms continue.

Unlike persons infected with seasonal influenza, persons with H1N1 influenza infections should be considered infectious from 1 day before the onset of illness to at least 7 days after illness onset. Persons who continue to be ill longer than 7 days after illness onset should be considered infectious until 24 hours after the resolution of fever and improvement of symptoms, whichever is longer.

Infection Control Measures:

At this time no vaccine specific to the novel influenza A (H1N1)/2009 is available. Vaccination with seasonal influenza vaccine does not appear to provide protection against this virus. However, vaccinating healthcare personnel and residents for seasonal influenza remains appropriate.

The following infection control measures are recommended to prevent person-person transmission of influenza like illness and to control outbreaks in healthcare facilities:

1. Surveillance – Routinely monitor residents and employees for symptoms consistent with influenza like illness

- Employees with confirmed, probable or suspected H1N1 influenza infection must stay at home and be removed from contact with residents or their environment for 7 days after the onset of illness **or** 24 hours after the resolution of fever and improvement of symptoms, whichever is longer.
2. Education – Educate personnel about the signs and symptoms of influenza like illness, control measures, and indications for obtaining appropriate testing.
 3. Influenza Testing - Test residents who present with symptoms of influenza-like illness by submitting specimens to a laboratory equipped to test for H1N1 influenza. Please see <http://pandemic.wisconsin.gov/category.asp?linkcatid=3124&linkid=903&locid=106> for the most up-to-date Wisconsin guidance on who should be tested.
 4. Reporting – A single laboratory-confirmed case of H1N1 influenza is reportable to the local public health department. Confirmed H1N1 influenza will be reported by the laboratory where it has been identified. Follow-up will be initiated by the health department, although providers may choose to initiate contact in order to receive guidance.

Outbreaks of respiratory illness are always reportable to the local health department or to the WI Division of Public Health. A respiratory disease outbreak is defined as three or more residents from the same unit whose onset of illness was within 72 hours of each other who have pneumonia, ILI or laboratory-confirmed viral or bacterial infection (including influenza) or a sudden increase in ILI or pneumonia over the facility's normal background rate. Please see <http://pandemic.wisconsin.gov/category.asp?linkcatid=3124&linkid=903&locid=106> for detailed guidance on testing, treatment, and reporting of outbreaks.

5. Antiviral Treatment – Guidance for antiviral treatment for H1N1 influenza is available from the WI Division of Public Health <http://pandemic.wisconsin.gov/docview.asp?docid=16675&locid=106>)
6. Respiratory Hygiene / Cough Etiquette Programs – Respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette should be implemented whenever residents or visitors have symptoms of respiratory infection. This includes the following:
 - Posting visual alerts instructing residents and persons who accompany them to inform healthcare personnel if they have symptoms of respiratory infection
 - Providing tissues or masks to residents and visitors who are coughing or sneezing so that they can cover their nose and mouth
 - Ensuring that supplies for hand washing are available where sinks are located; providing dispensers of alcohol-based hand rubs in other locations
 - Providing space for coughing persons to sit at least 3 to about 6 feet away from others, if feasible

7. Isolation Precautions

- Standard and Contact precautions plus eye protection should be used for all residents who are being evaluated for or are in isolation precautions for H1N1 influenza.
- **For residents:**
 - Whenever possible, residents should be immediately placed in private rooms with doors kept closed. If a private room is not available, the resident should be placed with a roommate who is able to maintain at least 6 feet from the other resident. Privacy curtains may be used to create a physical barrier between residents and their environments.
 - If a resident must leave his or her room, the resident must perform hand washing or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer **and** wear a surgical mask while outside their room.
- **For providers:**
 - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be donned upon room entry. This includes non-sterile gloves, gowns and eye protection.
 - Respiratory Protection – All healthcare workers should wear fit-tested N-95 respirators (or powered air purifying respirator) upon entering the rooms of residents in isolation.
 - Note: This recommendation differs from current infection control guidance for seasonal influenza, which recommends that healthcare personnel wear surgical masks for resident care.
 - Hand hygiene by washing with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer should be performed immediately after removing PPE and after any contact with respiratory secretions.
- Duration of precautions – Isolation precautions should be continued for seven (7) days from symptom onset **or** until 24 hours after the resolution of fever and improvement of symptoms, whichever is longer.

8. Visitors – In communities where H1N1 influenza is being transmitted, providers should limit points of entry so screening for influenza-like illness among visitors can occur upon arrival to entrances. Indiscriminate visiting by persons not essential to the residents' emotional well-being and care should be discouraged during this time. Visitors should be instructed to practice good hand hygiene and wear gowns, gloves, eye protection, and either surgical masks or an N-95 respirator when entering isolation rooms.

9. Environment – Routine cleaning and disinfection strategies used during influenza seasons can be applied to the environmental management of H1N1 influenza. Management of laundry, utensils and medical waste should also be performed in accordance with procedures followed for seasonal influenza.

RESOURCES:

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[Wisconsin Pandemic Flu](#)

[Pandemic planning checklist for providers](#)

[Infection Control](#)

[Standard Precautions](#)

[Contact Precautions](#)

[Respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette](#)

[Respirators](#)

CONTACTS:

[Local Public Health Departments](#)

[For Regulatory Questions Only](#)