

## **Assessing an employee's risk of exposure to pandemic influenza**

This guidance document was created to provide a quick assessment of an employee's risk of exposure to influenza in the event of a pandemic. The results of this assessment will help County department management and employees make plans to respond in the event of pandemic influenza. The assessment consists of seven questions that work through the risk factors associated with pandemic influenza. When answering the questions consider the employee's primary work environment.

### ***1. Does the employee work indoors?***

Working indoors means that employees are likely working close to other individuals. This may increase their risk of being of exposed to a potential virus. It is advised that all employees take general precautions to reduce their risk of contracting influenza. (See General Precautions on the back panel of this booklet.)

### ***2. Does the employee have frequent contact with the public?***

If an employee has frequent, daily contact with the public, look at how close they are to the individuals they come in contact with.

### ***3. Is that contact with the public usually more than five feet away?***

The influenza virus is usually spread through the air within three feet, so an infected person would normally have to be within three feet of another individual and then cough or sneeze. These respiratory secretions would then be inhaled by the other individual.

If the employee's contact with the public is typically more than five feet away, the employee is generally considered out of the zone which they would inhale the virus. The Health Department chose five feet over the more common three feet radius as an additional level of precaution for employees. However, even with contacts of more than five feet, employees still need to practice general precautions.

### ***4. Is the employee's contact with the public closer than five feet?***

If the employee's contact with the public is closer than five feet, then they are within range of sneezes and coughs of symptomatic individuals.

To mitigate the risk of becoming inflected with the virus, it is important to place a barrier between the employee and the public. In some cases this could be a physical barrier, such as Plexiglas screen separating the employee from the possibly infected individual. If this is not possible, a surgical mask should be used to create the barrier. Depending on the location, it may also be advisable to have a supply of masks for all public contacts with respiratory symptoms (especially cough) and provide instructions on the proper use and disposal of masks.

### ***5. Does the employee transport members of the public in a vehicle?***

Being in an enclosed space, such as a vehicle with a symptomatic individual increases the risk of infection since such employees are not only close to other individuals, they are less likely to get fresh air, so the concentration of the virus may be higher. Employees who transport members of the public can mitigate their risk of getting infected by wearing a mask to create a barrier between them and the airborne viruses. It would also be advisable to have a supply of masks for symptomatic individuals the employee may transport.

**6. Does the employee have frequent contact with sick people?**

While the employee may not be a health care provider, if their job frequently (daily), brings them close to sick individuals their risk of contracting the virus is increased. During a pandemic in order to lessen their chance of getting influenza, these employees may need to use a N 95 respirator. The N 95 respirator is designed to be fitted to an individual’s face and needs to be tested to ensure a correct fit. It is also advisable to have the mask fit tested yearly to maintain the correct fit.

**7. Is the employee a healthcare provider or do they work in a clinical setting?**

If the employee is a healthcare professional, they understand the importance of infection control in a clinical setting. For all individuals in close contact with sick patients, it is advisable to use gloves, gowns and a N 95 respirator. For more specific information about protection for health care providers go to the Centers for Disease Control website ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) to get the latest recommendations.

Also, take a moment to consider the employees who greet the patients or help them with financial issues, they also need to be protected from the virus. This may mean having all employees who come in contact with sick people masked. It is also advisable to provide masks, if you don’t already, for all symptomatic individuals coming into your office or clinic.

For a summary of the risk factors and the associated precautions, see the table on the next page

<b>Summary of Precautions</b>		
<b>Risk Factor</b>	<b>Yes?</b>	<b>Pandemic Precautions</b>
Does the employee work indoors?		A
Does the employee have frequent contact with the public in their job?		A
Is that contact usually more than 5 feet?		A
Is the contact the employee has with the public less than 5 feet?		A & B or C
Does the employee transport members of the public in a vehicle?		A & C
Does the employee have frequent contact with sick people?		A & D
Is the employee a healthcare provider or work in a clinical setting?		A, D, E, & F
<b>Key for Pandemic Precautions</b>		
A General Precautions		
B Installation of physical barrier to protect worker or the public		
C Surgical/Medical Masks available for employees & symptomatic public		
D N95 Respirators (fit testing required)		
E Gloves		
F Gowns		

## Lessons Learned From Seasonal Influenza

Every year there is a seasonal flu epidemic.

- ◆ 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu;
- ◆ more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications, and;
- ◆ about 36,000 people die from flu.<sup>1</sup>

Each year is slightly different but all in all there are some lessons that have been learned from previous flu seasons that can be applied to a pandemic influenza or the “normal” flu season.

### Key lessons learned to protect your employees and their families.

#### **Encourage your staff and their families to get a flu shot**

Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect against seasonal influenza. The season flu shot will not protect against a pandemic influenza but it will help Public Health authorities differentiate between seasonal and pandemic if the pandemic arrives during the “normal” flu season.

#### **Hand Hygiene**

Prevention of influenza transmission primarily requires strict attention to hand hygiene as the main protective measure. Employers should reinforce the “wash your hands” message and behaviors by making alcohol-based hand sanitizers widely available. Employers also may want to consider providing hand lotion as well since the use of hand sanitizers tends to dry out the skin.

#### **Respiratory Etiquette**

Employers may consider a “cover your cough” campaign. By providing not only educational tools but also strategically placed tissues, along with convenient waste disposal containers. As with the alcohol-based sanitizers, the availability reinforces the message and demonstrates the agency’s commitment to not only preventing the spread of influenza but also the health of their employees.

1. Centers for Disease Control. Influenza Fact Sheet: Key facts about influenza and the influenza vaccine. August 30, 2006

## Social Distance

Social distancing minimizes the kind of social contact that enables virus transmission. This includes but is certainly not limited to canceling events and closing offices. Social distance policies also may include Plexiglas barriers to protect individuals who are directly in contact with the public, removal of pens for public use or having a collection box where they can be disinfected before being handed to the next person, conference calls rather than face-to-face meetings, and telecommuting.

## Infectious Disease Policy

Part of social distancing includes ensuring that sick employees stay home. It is important to review your Department’s policy of sending employees home if they exhibit symptoms or become ill.

To encourage employees to stay home when sick, take in to account the organizational messages and policies that influence employees to come to work sick.

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## Mask vs. Respirators

**Medical masks**, also called surgical (which have ties or a single elastic band) or procedure masks (with ear loops) are designed to prevent the wearer from spreading germs to others through sneezing and coughing and to protect the wearer’s mucous membranes of the nose and mouth against infections spread by large respiratory droplets, generated by actions such as coughing, sneezing and talking.



**Respirators** often look like medical masks, and are used primarily in health care facilities. They are designed to protect the wearer from inhaling very small particles. Some respirators are made for single use and some are reusable, with filter cartridges that must be replaced periodically. Respirators are used in the medical setting to protect health care providers from airborne germs. Each individual must undergo a procedure called fit testing to be certain the respirator will be effective. Respirators labeled as “NIOSH-certified” N95, N99 or N100 protect against very small particles, although no respirator can ever guarantee full protection. Respirators are recommended for health care workers during certain high-risk settings and procedures.



## General Precautions

### Stop germs from spreading.

- Wash your hands frequently.
  - ⇒ Wash thoroughly with warm water and soap for 20 seconds.
  - ⇒ Make sure to wash your hands before eating, or touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
  - ⇒ If caring for ill persons, wash hands after providing assistance.
  - ⇒ Always wash your hands after sneezing, blowing your nose, or coughing, or after touching used tissues or handkerchiefs.
  - ⇒ If hand washing is not possible, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes.
- When coughing and sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with tissue, or cough and sneeze into your upper sleeve. Put used tissues in the trash and wash your hands.

### Stay home when you are sick.

- See your health care provider as soon as you can if you have a cough and a fever, and follow their instructions, including taking medicine as prescribed and getting rest.

### For additional information regarding Pandemic Influenza Precautions:

The Centers for Disease Control— [www.CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov)

US Department of Health and Human Services—[www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)

California State Compensation Insurance Fund—Loss Control Bulletin  
“Preparing for Pandemic Influenza” [www.scif.com/safety/losscontrol/Article.asp?ArticleID=447](http://www.scif.com/safety/losscontrol/Article.asp?ArticleID=447)

Monterey County Health Department Publications

Guidance for Non-Health Care Employers on Mask Usage  
in an Influenza Pandemic

Guidance for Employers on Returning to Work After Influenza Illness  
Your Guide to Preparing for Pandemic Flu

For Health Department Publications call—Karen Smith 755-4639

# Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Guidance

## Pandemic Influenza Precautions

*This guidance is intended to assist County departments in developing policies to decrease transmission of pandemic influenza in workplace settings.*

*During an influenza pandemic event, additional guidance specific to the particular virus will be provided by the Health Department to County departments, employees and the public.*



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