

Minimize exposure to H1N1

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The Kentucky Occupational Safety and Health Program published an updated bulletin in November on the H1N1 flu virus on its website. A link to the bulletin can be found on the home page of the state’s website <http://www.labor.ky.gov/ows/osh/>.

The purpose of the update appears twofold:

1. To notify Kentucky employers about a publication from the Centers for Disease Control called, “Interim Guidance on Infection Control Measures for 2009 H1N1 Influenza in Healthcare Settings, Including Protection of Healthcare Personnel;” and

2. To suggest measures for employers to take to prevent – or deal with – shortages of respiratory protective equipment.

The Kentucky OSH Program’s updated bulletin recommends that healthcare employers should follow the “hierarchy of controls” listed in the CDC’s Interim Guidance to minimize employee exposure to H1N1. The hierarchy is:

- **Elimination of Sources of Infection.** This method includes postponing patient visits, denying access to infected visitors, minimizing outpatient and emergency department visits for patients with flu-like illnesses, and requiring infected employees to stay home.

- **Engineering Controls.** These controls include installing partitions in triage areas to shield staff from respiratory droplets, and various kinds of ventilation controls which are described in the Guidance.

- **Administrative Controls.** These include vaccinating as many employees as possible, identifying and isolating infected patients, implementing respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette programs, and other hygienic measures.

- **Personal Protective Equipment.** Such equipment includes appropriate gloves, gowns, face masks, respirators, eye protection, and other PPE.

According to the CDC, PPE “ranks lowest on the hierarchy of controls” because it is the “last line of defense against hazards that cannot otherwise be eliminated,” and the effectiveness of PPE is dependent on a number of factors, including education in proper use, and use throughout the entire period of potential exposure.

With respect to respirators, the CDC recommends N95 respirators for healthcare workers to protect against H1N1.

The KOSH Program bulletin goes on to list seven steps healthcare employers can take to prevent or deal with shortages of respirators. These include obtaining them from non-medical equipment suppliers in addition to medical equipment suppliers, using different kinds of N95 respirators, re-using respirators under limited circumstances and after proper cleaning, and using stockpiled respirators. ▲

Free OSHA training calendar 2010

Each year the KY OSHA conducts a series of free training courses around the state. The courses are for both employers and employees, and they are typically given over a one-week period in population centers.

The courses are designed to outline the requirements contained in the various subparts of the General Industry and Construction Standards, covering both safety and health issues. About four weeks before each session begins, details will be available on KY OSH’s website (www.labor.ky.gov/ows/osh) for viewing and registration.

Dates and locations