

Getting a Grip on the Swine Flu!

Without doubt, recent reports on the H1N1 virus have been startling. For example, *Half the Nation May be Infected, 90,000 Deaths Possible* (USA Today, 8/25/09). But before we hit the panic button, it's important to remember that we've been here before – remember Y2K? And it's also important to listen to what the experts are really saying:

- During late August, influenza activity remained stable or continued to decline in most areas of the U.S. (U.S. Centers for Disease Control)
- During this same period, the proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza was below the epidemic threshold (National Respiratory & Enteric Virus Surveillance System)

Nonetheless, it's a known fact that while warm weather suppresses the flu virus, the onset of colder weather nationwide will cause it to increase and spread rapidly. And thus far, nearly 2 million cases have occurred in the U.S. with 522 deaths. In Canada, 11,000 cases have been confirmed and 67 have died. While the Canadian numbers are lower, Canada has the highest number of confirmed cases per capita. But unlike the great flu pandemic of 1918, which was caused by a variant H1N1 strain, we now understand how to prevent or minimize infection; we have medications such as Tamiflu and Relenza that are extremely effective in treating influenza; and by mid October, an H1N1 specific vaccination will be available. So this is not the time to panic – this is the time to learn. And there are simple, proactive steps recommended by the CDC to protect our health during the coming winter months:

- Plan on getting both your regular seasonal flu shot as well as the H1N1 injection.
- Doorknobs are one of the **worst** repositories of viral residue. So be aware of every doorknob that you

touch and never eat or touch your face, nose or eyes after handling a doorknob.

- Remember to frequently and vigorously wash your hands with soap and hot water. Rub your soapy hands together at least long enough to sing the Happy Birthday song to yourself. If unable to wash with soap and water, use an alcohol based hand sanitizer.



- Be doubly sure to treat yourself to good nutrition and adequate sleep. These are the two “sentinels” of good health!
- If you contract the flu (high fever and body aches are key indicators), stay home for a few days. This will ensure that you do not carry it to others and will also protect you from bacterial co-infections. Co-infections usually occur when a patient weakened by a virus gets hit with a bacterial bug. The CDC believes that many of the otherwise healthy children who have died from swine flu were co-infected.
- Avoid sneezing or coughing in the direction of others.

Keep abreast of the progression of the flu where you live by frequently visiting www.cdc.gov in the U.S. and www.hc-sc.gc.ca in Canada. Also, frequently visit your EAP Resource website www.theEAP.com by clicking the Employee Login button, and click on the H1N1 component on the left hand side. This site features a wealth of information.