

HELP PREVENT THE SPREAD OF SWINE FLU

Managing Hospitality Risk

WHAT'S AT RISK?

The novel H1N1 virus (commonly known as Swine Flu) has reached pandemic proportions, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). With over 70 countries reporting cases of humans infected with Swine Flu, on June 11, 2009, the WHO raised the worldwide pandemic alert level to Phase 6, indicating that a global pandemic is underway.

Hotels face a particular challenge as gathering places for people from across the country and around the world. Hotel workers, guests, and other visitors potentially carry the virus associated with this flu and intermingle on the premises in a 24-hour environment, exposing one another.

Scientists continue to watch this virus closely, fearing that this influenza strain will return in fall 2009 in a more virulent form. Hoteliers should remain vigilant about this flu over the summer and fall months, and continue to maintain high standards of cleanliness in their properties.

WHAT ARE YOUR LEGAL OBLIGATIONS?

As always, the lodging industry has a common law duty to exert a high level of care for its employees and visitors to its facilities. While hotels cannot completely control the introduction of the flu or any other communicable disease into their environment, they should take all available common-sense precautions, such as:



- Alerting guests to certain simple precautions that can limit their risk.
- Providing refresher training for all employees in the areas of sanitation, hygiene and food safety.
- Implementing additional procedures to sanitize guest room telephones, keyboards, remote controls, appliance handles, door knobs, light switches and other surfaces that are touched frequently.
- Having personal-size bottles of hand sanitizer and tissues readily available to guests and employees.
- Following the recommendation of Federal, State, and Local health organizations as they relate to control or mitigation of the pandemic.

HOW CAN YOU BETTER PROTECT YOUR ORGANIZATION?

For some suggestions designed to assist you in developing sound policies and procedures for yourself and your organization, please turn this document over and review the attached checklist.



For more information about this and other hospitality risk management topics, please contact:

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Checklist: Mitigating the spread of flu in Hotels

- Plan early for the impact of a pandemic on your business. Depending on the size and complexity of your property, it may be useful to designate a pandemic coordinator. A committee could be established and include the department heads from housekeeping, maintenance and engineering, security, food services, administration, front desk and bell services, and other appropriate individuals.
- If a flu pandemic threatens the nation you will need to think ahead about:
 - Restrictions on public gatherings – be prepared to inform your customers immediately of any events that need to be canceled.
 - Absenteeism – develop a method for determining when to send employees home, as well as procedures for handling the tasks normally done by workers who have become ill.
 - Infected areas – in the event that one of your guests or employees shows signs of being infected with influenza (symptoms include: fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches, eye infections, pneumonia, and/or severe respiratory diseases), you will need a plan for cleaning and handling rooms, restaurants and other areas that have been used by the infected person.
 - Other lodging business disruptions – employees who refuse to stay home, supplier disruptions, and travel restrictions resulting in substantial cancellations.
- Provide cards or pamphlets to guests that assure them the hotel is taking precautions to minimize exposure. Advise all guests to take their own precautions and to:
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick, the CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Train and educate employees to recognize symptoms and provide definitive procedures for reporting suspected illness.
- Determine availability and allocation of vaccine within your community.
- Be prepared to conduct symptom and temperature checks for employees. Have on hand material that advises guests how they can do this for themselves.
- Have a plan for dealing with sick guests. Pre-determine what role should be assumed in reporting to the family of an infected guest who is unable to communicate? What is to be done on notification of next of kin in the event of a death? These are issues to be reviewed with corporate counsel and the local authority having jurisdiction.
- Consideration should be given to adding a cancellation clause in the event of a flu pandemic for future contracts. Such an addition to the contract “boiler plate” should be reviewed with corporate counsel and senior management.
- Coordinate with the health authorities in the community to identify any restrictions or requirements that might be mandated during a pandemic emergency.
- Assign management personnel to track the latest developments in the fight to control the spread of H1N1.