

Preparing for a Pandemic – State Employees Human Resources FAQs

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The General questions numbered 1 through 6 were prepared with assistance from the Arizona Department of Health Services.



Look for these images to indicate the new and updated FAQs.

GENERAL

1. Why do I keep hearing the terms “swine flu” and “influenza pandemic”?

Answer: There has been, and continues to be, a growing concern about the possibility of an influenza pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), swine flu is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza virus that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. Swine Flu viruses cause high levels of illness and low death rates in pigs. Swine influenza viruses may circulate among swine throughout the year, but most outbreaks occur during the late fall and winter months similar to outbreaks in humans. The classical swine flu virus (an influenza type A H1N1) was first isolated from a pig in 1930.

For more in depth information about Swine Flu Influenza, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “Key Facts About Swine Influenza (Swine Flu)” at http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/key_facts.htm and the Arizona Department of Health Services, Division of Public Health Services at <http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oids/epi/flu>.

An influenza pandemic is a global outbreak of disease from a new influenza; a virus that is unlike past influenza viruses. Because people have not been infected with a similar virus in the past, most or all people will not have any natural immunity (protection) to a new pandemic virus.

2. What is the difference between seasonal flu, swine flu, bird flu and an influenza pandemic?

Answer:

Seasonal (or common) flu is a respiratory illness that can be transmitted person to person. Most people have some immunity and a vaccine is available.

Swine flu is a naturally occurring respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. Swine flu can be directly transmitted from pigs to people and people to pigs. Human infection with flu viruses from pigs are most likely to occur when people are in close proximity to infected pigs, such as in pig barns and livestock exhibits at fairs. Human-to-human transmission of swine flu can also occur. See the Wellness section of these FAQs for information regarding the swine flu vaccine.

Avian (or bird) flu (also referred to as the H5N1 flu strain) is caused by influenza viruses that occur naturally among wild birds. The virus is deadly to domestic fowl and can be transmitted from birds to humans. There is no human immunity to this virus and no vaccine is available. However, the Avian flu virus cannot easily be transmitted from person to person.

Influenza pandemic occurs when there is a worldwide outbreak of severe flu caused by a virus that is new to humans. Influenza pandemics occur when a new or markedly changed virus develops. Because some flu viruses develop and are very different from any virus seen before, there is no natural immunity (defenses) in the human population, and the disease can spread easily from person to person. In an influenza pandemic, many people could get sick at the same time, and many could die.

3. What is the State of Arizona doing to prepare for a possible influenza pandemic?

Answer: In Arizona, the Governor's Office, the Arizona Department of Health Services, the Arizona Department of Agriculture, and the Arizona Department of Game & Fish have all been involved in influenza pandemic preparedness. The Arizona Department of Health Services (DHS) has prepared an Influenza Pandemic Response Plan, which can be viewed on DHS's web site: www.azdhs.gov/pandemicflu.

4. When will an influenza pandemic get to Arizona?

Updated!

Answer: Currently, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared a pandemic due to novel H1N1 influenza.

5. Where can I learn more about the swine flu, Avian flu and the possibility of an influenza pandemic?

Answer: Additional, more specific information, including recommendations for individual and family preparedness, can be obtained from the following web sites:

- Federal government – www.pandemicflu.gov
- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) – www.cdc.gov
- CDC Hotline – 1.800.CDC.INFO (1.800.232.4636). TTY: 1.888.232.6348. This line is available in English and Spanish, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Questions can be emailed to cdcinfo@cdc.gov
- The World Health Organization (WHO) – www.who.int/en/
- Arizona Department of Health Services – www.azdhs.gov/pandemicflu

6. How can I better prepare for influenza illness during the pandemic?

Updated!

Answer: You are encouraged to educate yourself regarding the potential risks of an influenza pandemic and how to prepare – now! Preparation should include planning for potential illnesses and the need for leave should you or your family members become ill.

- Talk to your supervisor about working at a remote site.
- Train other employees to cover duties when employees become ill.

- Arrange emergency notification systems.
- Have supplies on hand in case you can't leave home.

LEAVE

1. What type of leave is available to me in case of an influenza pandemic under the current Personnel Rules?

Answer: There are no statutes or policies establishing special types of leave in case of an influenza pandemic. All currently available forms of leave may be considered in the event of an influenza pandemic. For further information review the Personnel Rules covering the following types of leave:

- Sick Leave
- Family Sick Leave (40 hours to care for child, spouse, or parent)
- Annual Leave
- Compensatory Leave
- Donated Annual Leave
- Leave Without Pay
- Medical Leave Without Pay

Note: Depending on the circumstances, leave taken due to the flu may qualify as part of the Family and Medical Leave Act. Each leave category mentioned above has a personnel rule associated with it. Please review the appropriate personnel rule for further information regarding each leave category or contact your agency human resources office for further information.

2. If I'm not sick, but I do not want to come to work for fear of becoming ill, are agencies required to authorize annual or compensatory leave?

Answer:

- First, obtaining clear, accurate information regarding the situation is critical.
- Agencies are not required to provide annual leave.
- In accordance with the federal Fair Labor Standards Act, if the use of compensatory leave will unduly disrupt the operations of the agency, the request for use of compensatory leave may also be denied. However, employees may be permitted to use such time within a reasonable period after making the request.
- Agencies are under no obligation to accommodate such fears. However, no one can predict the severity of an influenza pandemic. Depending on the circumstances, agency management may want to discuss the situation with you. Alternative work schedules and telecommuting are options that may become appropriate to review and consider.

3. **What if I use public transportation to travel to and from work and due to an influenza pandemic, the public transit system shuts down and I am unable to get to work. Will I get paid for the day(s) I'm unable to get to work?**

Answer:

- Agency directors have the authority under Personnel Rule R2-5-409 to authorize an employee to be absent with pay on **administrative leave** in emergency situations such as malfunction of publicly-owned or controlled equipment.
- Also, agencies may authorize employees to work from home, if employees' positions allow them to accomplish work from home.

4. **If I am out of the office on some type of paid leave or I am able to work but other employees are granted administrative leave due to an emergency situation, will I be granted paid administrative leave too?**

Answer: No.

5. **In addition to emergency situations, are there other situations that may occur during an influenza pandemic that authorize agency directors to grant paid administrative leave?**

Updated!

Answer: Yes, an agency director may authorize employees to be absent with pay on administrative leave during a state of emergency declared by the Governor. However, with the current pandemic, it is unknown whether it will rise to the level of a state of emergency.

6. **If I do not have enough leave to cover influenza pandemic-related absences, how can I afford to remain home until completely well before returning to work?**

Answer:

- You are encouraged to educate yourself regarding the potential risks of an influenza pandemic and how to prepare - now!
- You should stay home when you are sick or have flu symptoms.

7. **Are there any alternative compensation/leave policies being instituted to address this issue?**

Answer: No, not at this time.

8. **What if a co-worker comes to work ill, can he/she be ordered to leave the work premises?**

Answer: Yes.

9. What if I become ill but I am unable to contact my supervisor, will I lose my job?

Answer:

- If you are unable to contact your supervisor because you are incapacitated, request a family member or friend to contact your supervisor. If this is not possible, contact your supervisor as soon as possible.
- If phone service in the area has been affected, try to find an alternative method of contact.
- If you or a member of your immediate family is seriously ill, you may be eligible for leave under the provisions of the Family & Medical Leave Act. In an influenza pandemic situation, which most of us have not experienced before, a number of different and unanticipated events may be occurring, which could be affecting the basic infrastructure of the Valley, including telephone lines, transportation, and postal services.
- If it is determined that a separation for abandonment is the appropriate action, you will receive notification.

EMPLOYMENT AND STAFFING

1. Can I be transferred within my agency to another position? What about to another agency?

Answer:

- Yes. Permanent status employees may be **transferred** by an agency director to a position in the same pay grade within the agency. Employees must meet qualifications.
- Permanent status employees may also be **non-competitively special detailed** to positions for six months, without regard to grade or qualifications.
- Employees may request to be **transferred** from one agency to another agency, in the same grade, provided they meet the qualifications, and,
- Permanent status employees may also be assigned to uncovered positions under a mobility assignment with concurrence of the employee, the agency director and ADOA Director. If the mobility assignment is to another agency, the concurrence of the gaining agency director is also necessary.

Note: Agencies must also follow any policies, statutes and rules regarding appointments, background checks, finger printing requirements, licensure, etc.

WORK SCHEDULES/ALTERNATIVE WORKSITES

1. I heard some information regarding scheduling employees in shifts, how will this help in the case of an influenza pandemic?

Answer: Fewer employees in more shifts mean less exposure to the illness.

2. What if a large percentage of my co-workers become ill, what is the maximum number of overtime hours I can be required to work?

Answer:

- There is no limit to the number of hours your agency can require you to work.
- If you are a non-exempt employee, your agency is required to pay you overtime in the form of pay or compensatory leave for hours worked in excess of 40 per work week.
- If you are a covered, exempt employee, your agency is required to provide hour for hour compensatory leave for hours worked in excess of 40 per work week.
- If you are an uncovered, excluded employee, you do not receive any overtime or compensatory leave.

3. I have been identified as providing critical business functions for my agency, what is the maximum number of hours I can be required to work?

Answer:

- There is no limit to the number of hours your agency can require you to work.
- If you are a non-exempt employee, your agency is required to pay you overtime in the form of pay or compensatory leave for hours worked in excess of 40 per work week.
- If you are a covered, exempt employee, your agency is required to provide hour for hour compensatory leave for hours worked in excess of 40 per work week.
- If you are an uncovered, excluded employee, you do not receive any overtime or compensatory leave.
- Prior to any type of emergency it is important to know your roles and responsibilities and whether you provide a critical business function. For planning purposes, discuss with your supervisor any concerns or constraints you may have should an emergency arise.

4. Can you please explain social distancing as it relates to an influenza pandemic situation, what exactly is it, how will it help?

Answer: Social distancing means restricting physical contact such as handshakes, hugs, etc. It also involves limiting use of closed meeting rooms and large meetings. Employees should be educated to maintain a reasonable distance from each other as far as possible (6 feet is recommended).

WELLNESS

1. Isn't there a flu vaccine already available and will it prevent an influenza pandemic?

Updated!

Answer: There is a vaccine available that prevents seasonal flu. Currently, a vaccine for H1N1 is under production and will become available mid to late October.

2. Will there be enough seasonal flu vaccine available this year?



Answer: All indications from the Centers for Disease Control are that there will be an ample supply of flu vaccine available.

Influenza viruses change from year to year, so influenza vaccines must be updated annually to include the viruses that will most likely circulate in the upcoming season. There is a very tight timeline for selecting the influenza vaccine virus strains, preparing the vaccine (which is a very complex process), manufacturing, and distributing the vaccine. Due to the time constraints, any problems encountered during the process may cause shortages or delays.

3. When will the vaccine be available for H1N1?



Answer: We anticipate the vaccine for H1N1 to be made available in mid to late October. Initially, because of small quantities of vaccine, priority will be given to those at high risk of complications for H1N1 influenza. Eventually, there will be enough vaccine for everyone who would like to receive it.

4. When the H1N1 vaccine is available, will it be offered free to me on my health plan? Where will I be able to get vaccinated?



Answer: Once the State is able to obtain the vaccine, the Wellness program will make every effort to make it available to you. At this time, it is not known whether the H1N1 vaccine will be free to employees. If you are in one of the priority groups, please see your healthcare provider to ask about vaccination.

5. I've been told there is an anti-viral available to reduce the effects of the flu. Will it reduce the effects of an influenza pandemic? If so, will the health plan cover it?



Answer: There are anti-virals available that reduce the effects of the seasonal and H1N1 influenza. These anti-virals require a prescription from your healthcare provider. Please seek advice from your healthcare provider on whether you need anti-virals. Your health plan will provide information regarding covering the prescription.

6. What is the difference between a vaccine and an anti-viral medication?

Answer:

- **Vaccines** prevent illness. Vaccines produce antibodies against the virus it is made for, providing immunity against the virus. While there is currently a vaccine for the seasonal flu, there is not a vaccine for an influenza pandemic.
- **Anti-virals** are medications used for the early treatment of influenza. Anti-virals work by reducing the ability of the virus to reproduce but do not prevent or provide immunity against the virus. If taken shortly after getting sick (within 48 hours), anti-virals can reduce influenza symptoms, shorten the length of illness and reduce the serious complications of influenza. Anti-virals will likely be the only medical intervention available during the initial influenza pandemic response.

7. If an influenza pandemic materializes, what can I do to reduce my risks?

Answer: The Arizona Department of Health Services advises:

- Stay informed through regularly updated information about bird flu and pandemic flu.
 - [Arizona Department of Health Services](#)
 - [World Health Organization](#)
 - [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)
 - Key facts about swine influenza
 - Spread of avian influenza viruses among birds
 - Avian influenza vaccines
 - Avian influenza A viruses
 - Information on the vaccine development process: [National Institutes of Health](#)
- Stop germs from spreading.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with tissue when coughing and sneezing or cough into your arm or sleeve.
 - Wash your hands often. Hand sanitizers are also effective.
 - Stay home when you are sick.

8. How can I have two to three months of my on-going maintenance medications available in case I need to stay home during an influenza pandemic?

Answer: A convenient and less expensive mail-order service is available for members who require medications for ongoing health conditions or who are going to be in an area with no participating retail pharmacy for an extended period of time. It is suggested you set this up prior to an influenza pandemic. You can find the guidelines and instructions to do so on the Benefit Options web site www.benefitoptions.az.gov or by calling your benefits representative.

HEALTH INSURANCE AND OTHER BENEFITS

1. Will my health plan cover medical expenses associated with an influenza pandemic?

Answer: Yes, the health plan will pay for costs associated with an influenza pandemic, as long as you and your dependents are covered on the plan.

2. If I am ill and apply for short term disability benefits, will short term disability benefits be reinstated if I become reinfected?

Answer: Yes, if you are reinfected within 30 days. If you are reinfected **after** 30 days from the day you returned to work from the first infection, you will need to reapply for benefits.

3. Will the health plan cover anti-virals if my physician prescribes it?

Updated!

Answer: Yes. Anti-virals will lessen symptoms if started early in the course of the disease. In special circumstances, they can also be prescribed by your healthcare

provider to prevent you from becoming infected with influenza if you are exposed to someone who is sick. Prophylaxis is not appropriate for everyone, so please seek advice from your healthcare provider.

EMPLOYEE SERVICES

1. Should an influenza pandemic strike Arizona, what assistance will be available to help me cope with its impact emotionally and financially?

Answer: The State of Arizona provides resources to help employees and eligible dependents cope through its Employee Assistance Programs (EAP). The EAP provides free, confidential, short-term counseling to help identify concerns. When needed, the EAP may refer you to an outside program that can assist you and/or your dependents.

Employees can reach their agency's employee assistance program at the numbers listed below:

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| • AHCCCS | ComPsych | 866.379.0245 |
| • Education | EAP Preferred | 602.264.4600 |
| • DEQ | ComPsych | 800.272.7255 |
| • DES | ComPsych | 888.243.8200 |
| • DOT | Contact | 800.222.8335 |
| • DOC | On-site Assistance | 520.623.5832 x 220 |
| • ADOA* | ComPsych | 877.327.2362 |
- Agencies not specifically listed above should call the ADOA office number.

2. What financial resources are available to employees facing financial hardship during an influenza pandemic?

Answer:

- Employees may apply to Employees Helping Employees (EHE) for financial assistance. Employees generously contribute to EHE, an employee-run foundation that helps employees when they need short-term financial assistance. Additional information can be obtained at <http://www.azehe.org>.
- Employees may also find Community based resources through the Work/Life web site at <http://www.hr.state.az.us/worklife> and then click on Resources and then Community Resources. There are a number of emergency community based resources listed.

COMMUNICATION

1. Will there be a primary source of information for employees and health plan members (i.e., hotline, web site)?

Answer: Development of hotlines, employee blogs, web sites, etc. is currently being discussed. More information will be shared as developments occur.

2. When should I begin educating myself and my family regarding the potential of an influenza pandemic?

Answer: You are encouraged to educate yourself and your family regarding the potential risks of an influenza pandemic and how to prepare - now! Preparation should include planning for potential illnesses and the need for leave should you or your family members become ill.

3. Do I need to plan for an influenza pandemic?

Answer: Yes. In the event of a pandemic, you will play a key role in protecting you and your family's health and safety. Planning for an influenza pandemic is critical. To assist you in your efforts, the Arizona Department of Health Services has developed a checklist. It identifies important, specific activities you can do now to prepare. The checklist can be obtained at <http://www.azdhs.gov/pandemicflu>.

4. I understand that employees can be required to work overtime beyond their normal work hours. What is the best way to approach my supervisor regarding family commitments during these situations, particularly if I have been identified as an employee who provides critical business functions?

Answer:

- While there is no limit to the number of hours an employer can require you to work, if the situation allows and there is more than one employee in the same classification qualified to do the work, your agency may assign overtime in the following order:
 - To those employees who requested overtime.
 - On a rotational basis among those who are willing to work overtime.
 - Or on a rotational basis in the absence of the first two alternatives.
- Non-exempt employees are required to receive overtime in the form of pay or compensatory leave for hours worked in excess of 40 per work week.
- Covered, exempt employees are required to receive hour for hour compensatory leave for hours worked in excess of 40 per work week.
- Uncovered, excluded employees do not receive any overtime or compensatory leave.

COMPENSATION

1. Will the State offer employees who are well a pay incentive to come to work?

Answer: At this time, there is nothing that authorizes such a pay incentive.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

1. If I believe I caught the flu from another employee or one of our customers/clients, can I file a claim with Workers' Compensation?

Answer: You should report your desire to file a workers' compensation claim with your supervisor who will complete an accident report form. ADOA Risk Management will determine whether the claim is valid.