

# H1N1 Viewed as Unstable

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According to a recent conference of health experts in Chicago, a big concern about the H1N1 influenza, also referred to as swine flu, is that it is “unstable.” This is because the experts say they are unsure of the disease’s direction and what age groups will be most impacted.

Currently, H1N1 has not been as severe as predicted. However, it is inflicting younger people much more than other segments of the population, which is a bit surprising. “This may be because people over 50 may have some natural immunity to the virus,” said Dr. Damon Arnold of Illinois’ Department of Public Health.

Because of the “unstable” nature of the disease, Mike Nelson, vice president of Pro-Link, a jansan buying and marketing group, suggests the cleaning industry “and specifically janitorial distributors and facility service providers be vigilant, helping our end-customers minimize the spread of the disease.”

Specifically, Nelson advises the following workplace preparedness guidelines:

- Identify a point person who will take the lead regarding influenza issues at their workplace
- Formulate a business plan in the event of a significant increase in absenteeism due to the illness
- Prioritize business functions, determining what tasks must be performed and which can be delayed if there is widespread absenteeism
- If staff members travel as part of their job, have a point person to keep up with H1N1 travel advisories
- Establish an emergency employee/business communication plan to communicate with absent employees, customers, and vendors should H1N1 impact business operations.

The last major influenza epidemic in the U.S. occurred in 1918. At that time, Philadelphia had the most cases and deaths, whereas St. Louis, MO, had relatively few.

Why did this occur?

“Public health experts say it was because St. Louis incorporated a number of preventive measures, such as those mentioned here, that minimized the impact of the disease,” says Nelson, “and Philadelphia did not. That is why [these measures] are called for now.”



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