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# Special Report for HR Professionals

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## HOW HR PROFESSIONALS CAN HELP MANAGE SWINE FLU IMPACT AT WORK

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It's official folks. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has issued a declaration proclaiming that swine flu "now has significant potential to affect national security."

([www.hhs.gov/secretary/phe\\_swh1n1.html](http://www.hhs.gov/secretary/phe_swh1n1.html))

As of the morning of April 30, 2009, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) web site reported 109 confirmed cases of swine flu in the United States.

([www.cdc.gov/swineflu/](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/))

How can there be a pandemic when there are only 109 officially reported cases? The answer lies in computer modeling. Health officials have determined that the handful of cases a few days ago, that have grown in number to over 100 now, can be predicted to involve thousands of individuals in the very near future. That begs some questions about how employers should be thinking about the situation. Do we have a policy for employee sickness/absence? What will we do if a critical number of employees are absent from a given department or operating unit? How will we advise our employees to react when they believe they have been exposed to the flu? Should we be providing masks to all our workers?

"After reporting earlier this week that [one of its employees was diagnosed with swine flu](#), Ernst & Young told its workers they could work from home. Typically, large firms like Ernst & Young have the technological resources and size to make such an offer." (MSNBC - <http://yourbiz.msnbc.msn.com/archive/2009/04/29/1912834.aspx>)

What if such an approach doesn't work for your organization? CDC says there are some practical suggestions you should be making to everyone in the workforce right away:

1. **Avoid close contact** with people who are sick. If you get sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too.
2. **Stay home when you are sick.** If possible stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.

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3. **Cover your mouth and nose.** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
4. **Clean your hands.** Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.
5. **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth.
6. **Practice other good health habits.** Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

([www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm))

You might even consider having this list posted on your employee bulletin boards so everyone can see it.

Asking what you should do if a large percentage of your workforce becomes ill and misses work is no longer hypothetical. HR professionals should be in daily contact with senior executives to discuss current absence rates and action plans for dealing with rates that exceed normal. Senior executives need to understand that this health problem has the potential to impact the organization in financial ways that might be severe. If the U.S. Government has declared that national security is potentially at risk because of the swine flu, then we should be giving serious consideration to how it will impact our employment organizations.

*"...a public health emergency exists nationwide involving Swine Influenza A that affects or has significant potential to affect national security." - Acting HHS Secretary Charles E. Johnson*

## EMPLOYEE HEALTHCARE BENEFITS SURVEY 2009 ISSUED BY WAGELINK

WageLINK...The Compensation Information Exchange...has issued updated results from its 2009 survey of Employee Healthcare Benefits. Some of the key results are:

98% of surveyed employers provide medical insurance for their workers. 90% offer a prescription drug plan. 92% have a plan for employee dental coverage. In terms of the type of medical insurance plan offered to employees, 76% said they offer Preferred Provider Organization (PPO) coverage. 29% favor Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) coverage.

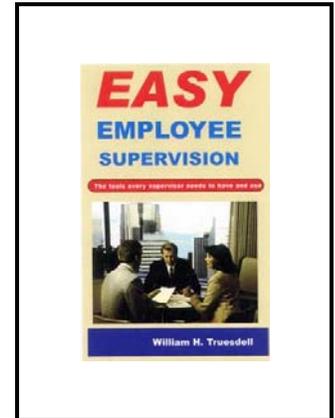
Of those offering PPO coverage, 49% require a deductible before providing benefits. 12% of the HMO programs do the same. 22% of employers charge less than \$150 per month for family health coverage and the same amount charge between \$150 and \$200 per month.

([www.survey.constantcontact.com/survey/a07e2dv66r4fmknot6e/results](http://www.survey.constantcontact.com/survey/a07e2dv66r4fmknot6e/results))

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## EEOC BEST PRACTICES ON WORK/FAMILY BALANCE

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has published a list of “Best Practices” for dealing with Work/Family Balance issues. These include caregiver considerations as impacted by the latest changes to the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. The aim is to help employers avoid charges of illegal discrimination. ([www.eeoc/policy/docs/caregiver-best-practices.html](http://www.eeoc/policy/docs/caregiver-best-practices.html))

In 2007, the EEOC issued guidance on “Unlawful Disparate Treatment of Workers with Caregiving Responsibilities.” This new document supplements those earlier suggestions. ([www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/caregiving.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/caregiving.html))

Key concerns in this latest offering are that there not be assumptions about men vs. women when considering individuals for employment. If a job candidate should disclose during an interview that it is necessary to care for a disabled child, an employer would be wrong to consider such information in the employment decision. The fear of frequent or extended absences as a result of the caregiver responsibilities is not a legal reason for disqualifying the candidate.

With our aging population, and an increase in employees who have responsibility for caring for parents this is a timely issue for employers to consider. HR professionals should develop ways that selecting managers can be trained in all EEO requirements, including caregiver protections.

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## JAN RELEASES PANDEMIC FLU FACT SHEET

In the U.S. Department of Labor there is an agency known as the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). That agency manages the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) that assists employers with questions about disability accommodation requests on the job. Their assistance is free of either cost or obligation, other than to willingly assist another employer in the future if asked to do so.

This week, the JAN released a new fact sheet, *Considering the Needs of Employees with Disabilities During a Pandemic Flu Outbreak*. It covers Critical Questions; Telework; and General Considerations. There are also Internet links to valuable resources you can use immediately. The fact sheet is available in both English and Spanish languages. It is only four pages long and comes in MSWord format.

<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/employmentpandemicflufact.doc>

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