Novel H1N1 Influenza

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(September 7, 2009) The following news was released by OSHA on September 4:

"The Department of Labor and three other federal agencies announced new guidance for employers to plan and respond to the upcoming flu season. The guidance, released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, provides employers with help on preparing now for the impact that seasonal and 2009 H1N1 influenza could have on their workers and operations during the fall and winter. Plans should include encouraging workers with flu-like symptoms to stay home, allowing highly-susceptible staff to work from home and encouraging workers to get flu vaccinations."

Additional Links for Further Information:

- World Health Organization (WHO) Influenza A(H1N1)
- One-stop access to U.S. Government swine, avian and pandemic flu information
- CDC: H1N1 Flu Clinical and Public Health Guidance
- OSHA: Pandemic Influenza
- NIOSH: Occupational Health Issues Associated with H1N1 Influenza Virus (Swine Flu)
- New England Journal of Medicine: H1N1 Influenza Center
- Center for Infectious Disease Research & Policy (U of Minn.): Swine Influenza

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(June 11, 2009) The Associated Press this morning is reporting that the “World Health Organization told its member nations it was declaring a swine flu pandemic Thursday — the first global flu epidemic in 41 years — as infections climbed in the United States, Europe, Australia, South America and elsewhere. In a statement sent to member countries, WHO said it decided to raise the pandemic warning level from phase 5 to 6 — its highest alert — after holding an emergency meeting on swine flu with its experts. The long-awaited pandemic decision is scientific confirmation that a new flu virus has emerged and is quickly circling the globe. It will trigger drugmakers to speed up production of a swine flu vaccine and prompt governments to devote more money toward efforts to contain the virus.” There will be a Live webcast of the WHO press conference at Noon EDT today, presumably to announce the change in pandemic status. What a shift to Phase 6 of the pandemic warning level will mean to Flight Attendants is unclear at this time, but stay tuned for further updates as the situation unfolds.

(June 8, 2009) The WHO today issued Influenza A(H1N1) - update 45: “As of 06:00 GMT, 8 June 2009, 73 countries have officially reported 25,288 cases of influenza A(H1N1) infection, including 139 deaths.” Last week, on June 5, 2009, the U.S. CDC issued new Interim Guidance for Airlines Regarding Flight Crews Arriving from Domestic and International Areas Affected by Swine Influenza. This guidance offers several useful recommendations for dealing
with potentially infected passengers and should be shared with your carrier's inflight operations and medical departments. For example, "[c]rew members should wear impermeable, disposable gloves onboard aircraft if they need to have direct contact with potentially contaminated surfaces such as airplane seats, tray tables, and lavatories used by ill passengers;" when "having close contact with an ill person [crew members] should keep their interactions with the ill person as brief as possible and may choose to wear a facemask or a N95 respirator on a voluntary basis;" and "flight deck crew should ensure that the aircraft air conditioning/ventilation system stays on until all passengers and crew have disembarked in order to maximize continued removal of virus particles from the cabin air."

(May 20, 2009) The Association of Flight Attendants-CWA (AFA-CWA) testified May 20th on Capitol Hill regarding concerns that arose after a recent public health emergency and the summer travel outlook for this year. The U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Aviation conducted the hearing which focused on aviation consumer issues and emergency contingency planning during public health emergencies.

(May 8, 2009) At this time, the WHO has NOT updated the Influenza A (H1N1) pandemic alert from phase 5 to phase 6. Here is the latest on the current situation per the WHO: As of 16:00 GMT, 8 May 2009, 25 countries have officially reported 2500 cases of influenza A (H1N1) infection.

(April 30, 2009) An update to the AFA-CWA Swine Flu bulletin is now available (the April 27, 2009 version has been retired). This update includes the latest list of countries with confirmed cases, and notes that the US now has one flu-caused fatality.

(April 29, 2009) The CDC has posted two guidance documents of interest to airline crews:
1. Interim Guidance to Assist Airline Flight Deck and Cabin Crew in Identifying Passengers Who May Have Swine Influenza
2. Interim Guidance for Airlines Regarding Flight Crews Arriving from Domestic and International Areas Affected by Swine Influenza
Please check the CDC Swine Flu guidance page for continuing updates to these two documents, as well as any other documents of interest that may be posted in the coming days and weeks.

(April 29, 2009 WHO Update) Level of influenza pandemic alert raised from phase 4 to 5
29 April 2009 -- Based on assessment of all available information and following several expert consultations, Dr Margaret Chan, WHO's Director-General raised the current level of influenza pandemic alert from phase 4 to 5. She stated that all countries should immediately activate their pandemic preparedness plans. At this stage, effective and essential measures include heightened surveillance, early detection and treatment of cases, and infection control in all health facilities.

(April 28, 2009) AFA-CWA has written a letter to Dr. Fred Tilton, the FAA Federal Air Surgeon, requesting that the FAA issue an emergency order to all air carriers with specific steps to help reduce the risk of Swine flu transmission to crews and passengers. Copies of this letter were sent to Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and Acting FAA Administrator Lynne Osmus. [Added August 28, 2009: Dr. Tilton responded to the AFA-CWA letter requesting an emergency order with this letter, which expressed concern for flight attendants who could be exposed to passengers potentially carrying swine flu and noted that the FAA has developed SAFO #09009, dated 4/29/09, to inform airline operators of CDC guidance.]

(April 27, 2009) Swine flu is a viral infection that is typically only passed between pigs. A newly-identified A strain (H1N1) of this virus is reported to pass from person to person. The first cases were reported in Mexico, and, at the time of this writing, cases have now been confirmed in the US, Canada, and Europe.

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