

Newsletter Sept 09

The health services are predicting a second wave of Swine Flu during October, and already Universities are reporting a high infection rate after the return to study. Although we perceive it as just another Flu strain, with few serious effects, it is still highly contagious. Think of the effect of an outbreak in a small business, (building company, adventure centre, hairdresser etc.) where all or most of the staff are off sick for up to 10 days!

There are a few practical steps that can be taken to try to reduce the risk of infection, at least whilst you staff are with you:

Provide staff with the latest government advice (see

www.dh.gov.uk/Publicationsandstatistics/publications//PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_098685)

Consider more frequent cleaning of door handles and surfaces - the main transmitter for swine flu.

Encourage staff to follow basic hygiene procedures such as frequent hand washing and use of disposable tissues that are immediately thrown away after use.

Advise staff who feel unwell to stay away and contact the National Pandemic Flue Line for advice.

Make it clear that if diagnosed with swine flu they must stay home for 7 - 10 days. (people are most infectious after they develop symptoms and remain so for at least 5 days)

Look out for signs of employees forcing themselves to work when unwell (esp in the current climate of job insecurity).

There have also been some claims in the press that employers can be sued for allowing the spread of swine flu due to lack of proper management. While this is technically true (under the HASAW Act 1974 employers have a duty to ensure the Health, Safety and Welfare of their staff, and have a duty to try to prevent infections spreading at work), the reality is that it would be impossible to prove that the infection was not caught off, say, a supermarket trolley! Even the 'No win no fee' lawyers would struggle with this one!