

# 2009-2010 Influenza Season Preparation

## A Human Resources Guide



**The Manager's Toolbox**

*Department of Human Resources*

*Learn... Grow... Lead... Excel*

*Committed to Excellence*



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## 2009-2010 Influenza Season Preparation

### *Purpose of this Guide*

The purpose of this guide is to provide information to help Washoe County Departments determine appropriate measures to implement during the upcoming flu season. It is based on recommendations from the Department of Health & Human Services-USA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and is compliant with all applicable laws, regulations and Washoe County policies.

### **The Importance of Planning**

As with any situation or challenge faced by Department Heads, the key to managing successfully begins with planning. Each department is encouraged to begin planning now for the 2009/2010 flu season. In addition to seasonal flu, the business operations of the County may be impacted by an outbreak of the H1N1 influenza. Departments already experiencing reduced staffing levels will need to be prepared in the event of increased absenteeism due to employees' and employees' family illness.

Departments should build a plan to:

- Reduce transmission of illness among staff, customers and the public
- Protect people who are at increased risk of influenza related complications from getting infected
- Maintain business operations
- Minimize adverse effects on other entities in supply chains

### **The Contents of the Plan**

The CDC recommends two levels of planning in order to enable you to continue business operations in the event of a continuation of the current level of severity of flu outbreaks and to change measures in the event of an increase in the level of severity.

The departmental pandemic flu plan needs to include measures to address employee and customer issues, operational demands and communication strategies. Specifically, it should:

- Provide measures to protect workers and the public.
- Provide measures that ensure business operations can continue.

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- Identify essential business functions and critical supply chains that are needed to keep your area running or are otherwise mandated.
  - ✧ Address mandated hours of operation, if applicable.
  - ✧ Identify those functions that would be necessary to keep the department running.
  - ✧ Identify the people who can perform those functions
  - ✧ Identify non-essential work, tasks, or functions that can slide.
  - ✧ Identify who can cover essential functions and how to train those you may need
  - ✧ Contemplate worst case scenarios.
- Identify possible work-related exposure and health risks.
- Plan for how you will operate if a high number of employees must stay home or your supply chains are interrupted.
  - ✧ Determine the threshold level of absenteeism that would threaten operation of functions.
- Provide for flexibility on sick leave, worksites, telecommuting, and work hours (consider technology impacts).
- Consider the need for changing operations, hours, or closing.
- Set up triggers (e.g. communications from District Health Department) and procedures for starting and ending the response plan, including roles, responsibilities and contact information for:
  - ✧ Members of Pandemic Flu Recovery Team
  - ✧ Pandemic Flu Plan Administrator
  - ✧ Person responsible for activating and deactivating flu plan
- Establish a process to communicate information to workers, business partners, customers, and citizens on the pandemic response plans and how it affects them.
- Anticipate employee fear, anxiety, rumors, and misinformation and plan communications accordingly.

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## 2009-2010 Influenza Season Preparation

### *Quick Reference Guide for 2009-2010 Influenza Season Planning and Response*

The Department of Health & Human Services-USA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security recommend that businesses prepare now for the upcoming flu season by taking steps to ensure both the health and safety of workers, customers and the public, as well as the continuity of operations. Washoe County departments already operating with fewer employees may experience difficulty maintaining service levels if the outbreak should become more severe than in previous years.

Local flu conditions will influence your decisions to implement strategies to lessen the spread of flu. The Action Steps on page 6 detail the steps you should take during an initial or Level 1, outbreak of seasonal flu.

If flu conditions become more severe than those experienced during the spring/summer 2009, there may be even higher employee absenteeism and a need to add additional protective measures. Consider following the measures shown on page 7 if flu conditions are more severe and use them along with the action steps recommended in the 1st level planning.

To help you better prepare for both contingencies, it is recommended that planning be undertaken to manage under typical seasonal flu conditions and to enable departments to increase or add measures in the event of a heightened level of severity. The checklist provided on page 8 will help ensure you have considered everything you need in order to put a detailed Pandemic Plan in place.

## 2009-2010 Influenza Season Preparation

### Action Steps for Current/Typical Severity Flu Conditions

**Sick employees should stay home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever.** Symptoms of flu-like illness are fever or chills and cough or sore throat and can also include runny nose, body aches, headache, tiredness, diarrhea, or vomiting. Fever is usually described as 100°F (37.8° C) or greater. The symptoms of 2009 H1N1 flu virus in people include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu, including the 2009 H1N1 and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

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**Sick employees at work should be sent home.** Employees who appear to have flu-like illness upon arrival or become sick during the work day should be promptly sent home.

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**Encourage employees to wash their hands often.** Remind staff to wash hands often with soap and water or to use alcohol-based hand cleaner, especially after coughing or sneezing.

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**Encourage employees to cover their coughs and sneezes.** Communicate the importance of covering coughs and sneezes and provide tissues and no-touch wastebaskets.

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**Clean surfaces and items that have frequent hand contact.** Clean frequently touched surfaces with typically used cleaning agents. Additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is not recommended.

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**Encourage employees to get vaccinated.** Encourage employees to get vaccinated for seasonal flu and employees at higher risk for flu complications to get vaccinated for 2009 H1N1 flu when vaccines are available to them.

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**Protect employees who are at higher risk for complications of flu.** Those at higher risk for complications of flu, like pregnant women and people with certain chronic medical conditions such as heart disease and asthma, should check with their health care provider promptly, if they become sick. Encourage these employees to get vaccinated for seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 flu as recommended when vaccines are available.

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**Prepare for increased numbers of employee absences due to illness in employees and their family members and plan ways for essential business functions to continue.** Cross-train staff to perform essential functions so that business operations can continue.

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**Advise employees before traveling to take certain steps.** Advise workers to check for signs of flu-like illness before traveling, to notify their supervisor, and stay home if they are sick. If employees become sick during travel, they should stay in their hotel room unless they are seeking medical care.

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**Prepare for the possibility of school dismissals or temporary closure of child care programs.** Allow workers with children to leave or to stay home if schools are dismissed or child care programs are closed. Encourage them to plan for child care alternatives if possible.

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## 2009-2010 Influenza Season Preparation

### Additional Action Steps for Conditions of Increased Flu Severity

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**Consider active screening of employees who report to work.**

At the beginning of the workday or the beginning of each shift, ask all employees about flu-like symptoms and those with symptoms should be asked to go home.

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**Consider alternative work environments for employees at higher risk of complications of flu during periods of increased flu activity in the community.**

When possible, change work duties, work location, or work schedules for employees who are at higher risk for flu complications to reduce the number of exposures to people that may have flu. If this cannot be done, allow these employees to work from home or stay home, if feasi-

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**Increase social distancing in the workplace.**

Avoid crowded work settings, cancel large business-related face-to-face meetings, utilize telephone conferencing and e-mails, space workers farther apart (3 feet between desks is recommended), cancel non-essential travel, promote telecommuting, and use staggered shifts to

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**Prepare for school dismissals or closure of child care programs.**

School dismissals and closure of child care programs are more likely when flu conditions are more severe. Be prepared to allow workers to stay home to care for their children if schools are dismissed or child care programs are closed.

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**Other considerations.**

Employers should be aware that the severity of 2009 H1N1 flu could change rapidly and public health recommendations could be revised quickly. Planners should have access to sources of timely and accurate information and be ready to promptly implement revised or ad-

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## 2009-2010 Influenza Season Preparation

### *Pandemic Planning Checklist*

#### *Our department plan:*

- Provides measures to protect workers.
- Provides measures that ensure business operations can continue.
- Identifies essential or mandated business functions and critical supply chains that are needed to keep our area running.
- Contemplates worst case scenarios.
- Addresses what would need to be done to keep the department running.
- Identifies which jobs/who is essential and who will do their work if they are out sick.
- Identifies the work we must do.
- Addresses mandated hours of operations and /or functions.
- Identifies possible work-related exposure and health risks.
- Addresses how we will operate if a high number of employees must stay home or our supply chains are interrupted.
- Determines the threshold level of absenteeism that would threaten operation of functions.
- Provides for flexibility on sick leave, worksites, telecommuting, and work hours (consider technology impacts).
- Considers the need for changing operations, hours, or closing.
- Set up of triggers and procedures for starting and ending the response plan, including roles, responsibilities and contact information.
- Identifies the members of our Pandemic Flu Recovery Team.
- Identifies our Pandemic Flu Plan Administrator.
- Identifies the person responsible for activating and deactivating flu plan.
- Establishes a process to communicate information to workers, business partners, customers, and citizens on the pandemic response plans and how it affects them.
- Anticipates employee fear, anxiety, rumors, and misinformation and plans communications accordingly.

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## 2009-2010 Influenza Season Preparation

### *Pandemic Flu Questions & Answers (FAQ's)*

**Q. Why should the County plan for a flu response?**

Steps can be taken now to slow the spread of flu in the workplace. It is possible that flu conditions may become more severe, so it is important to plan now for how to respond under those circumstances. Planning can help protect your operation and your employees if flu conditions become more severe. Planning can help:

- Minimize disruption to business activities
- Protect employees' health and safety
- Limit the negative impact to the community, economy and society

**Q. Why should we be concerned about the spread of flu in the workplace?**

County workplaces may act as a "point of spread," where employees can easily spread flu to fellow employees as well as to others in the community. The flu can have a major impact on operations. Employees may stay home because they are sick or because they need to care for sick family members. They may also need to stay home to care for children, if schools or childcare programs close.

**Q. Can the flu virus live on surfaces, such as computer keyboards?**

Yes, the virus can live on hard objects up to 8 hours. Flu virus may be spread from touching a hard surface or objects where the virus has landed, and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Routine cleaning of surfaces will help stop the virus from spreading. Routine cleaning of surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact with cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas is recommended.

**Q. What should the departments do to prepare?**

1. Departments should prepare a plan to help them manage their operations in both regular seasonal flu conditions and more severe levels of outbreak.
  - Involve employees in the development and review of the plan
  - Conduct an exercise, drill or discussion to ensure understanding and to test key components
  - Share and communicate your plan with employees and explain the policies, etc. that will apply
2. Take precautions to help prevent employees from getting sick.
  - Advise employees to stay home if they are sick.
  - Encourage respiratory etiquette by providing education and reminders about covering coughs and sneezes with tissues and providing easy access to tissues and trash cans.
  - Encourage hand hygiene by providing education and reminders about hand washing and provide easy access to running water and soap or alcohol-based hand cleaners.
  - Separate employees who become sick at work and ask them to go home.

## 2009-2010 Influenza Season Preparation

### *Pandemic Flu Question & Answers - continued*

- Clean a sick employee's work area once the employee has left. The area should be cleaned with antibacterial wipes or antibacterial cleaner. The employee cleaning the area should wear gloves and wipe down door knobs, phones, keyboards, counters and other surfaces in the area. After cleaning, the employee should properly wash their hands.

Routinely clean surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact with cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas. Additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is not recommended.

- Encourage employees to not use another's work area, including phones and computers. If this is unavoidable, the employee should clean the area as above before and after their shift. After they have finished cleaning the area, the employee should properly wash their hands.
- Encourage all employees who want flu protection to get vaccinated for both seasonal flu and for H1N1 flu when they become available.

#### **Q. How do I know if someone has H1N1 flu or seasonal flu?**

It will be very difficult to tell if someone who is sick has the H1N1 flu or seasonal flu. Public health officials and medical authorities are not recommending laboratory tests. Anyone with flu-like symptoms should stay home. Symptoms of both types of flu include: Fever or chills and cough or sore throat. Symptoms can also include runny nose, body aches, headache, tiredness, diarrhea, or vomiting.

#### **Q. In the event someone in my department is confirmed with H1N1 Influenza, should I advise the rest of my staff?**

Under no circumstances should you reveal medical information. If you have reason to believe that an employee's diagnosis has put co-workers at risk, we suggest you provide a generalized statement that would not single out the infected individual as an employee, visitor, customer, or member of the public. A simple statement such as, "Our department has been exposed to H1N1 Flu and I would like to remind all of us to take the necessary precautions and monitor our health accordingly."

#### **Q. Can I ask employees if they have the flu or have been exposed to the flu?**

While there is no specific prohibition on inquiring whether an employee has flu or has been exposed to flu, remember they may not have visited a doctor and/or may not have received an official diagnosis of influenza. Knowing whether or not employees have the flu or another seasonal ailment, is less important than recognizing symptoms of illness and asking employees to stay home until their symptoms have gone.

#### **Q. How long should a sick employee stay home?**

Under current flu conditions, employees with flu-like symptoms should stay home for at least 24 hours *after* they no longer have a fever or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medicines. If flu conditions become more severe, employees should stay home

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## 2009-2010 Influenza Season Preparation

### *Pandemic Flu Question & Answers - continued*

7 days. A person who is still sick after 7 days should stay home until 24 hours after their symptoms have gone away.

**Q. Should household members of sick people stay home, too?**

Employees with an ill household member may go to work. But, it is especially important that these employees monitor themselves for illness.

**Q. How should the time off be recorded?**

*Please be sure to review the Manager's & Supervisor's Guide to the Appropriate Use of Sick Leave as well as any applicable collective bargaining agreements.* In general, employees should use their sick leave time when they call in or leave work sick.

## 2009-2010 Influenza Season Preparation

### *Employer Rights and Responsibilities*

*Excerpt from McDonald-Carano-Wilson, Employment/Labor Law Group  
September 24, 2009 (To WC Risk Management)*

According to a recent Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidance document entitled “ADA-Compliant Employer Preparedness for H1N1 Flu Virus,” employers may take various measures during a pandemic to both ensure the health and safety of their workers, and the continued stability in operation of their business, without violating the ADA. These include requiring employees to adopt infection control practices such as regular hand washing, coughing, and sneezing etiquette, and tissue usage and disposal; requiring employees to wear personal protective equipment, such as face masks, gloves, or gowns that are intended to reduce transmission of the H1N1 flu virus; or even requiring employees to telecommute as an infection control strategy.

Employers may also engage in a survey of their employees about factors, including chronic medical conditions, which may cause them to miss work in the event of a pandemic. Surveys should ask broad questions that are not limited solely to disability related inquiries. For example, the survey should seek information about various reasons an employee would be unable to come to work, including mandatory school closures, public transportation unavailability, and chronic illnesses at high risk for complications from the pandemic.

The H1N1 flu virus will likely qualify as a serious health condition, for which employers will be required to allow eligible employees to take unpaid leave if they are sick with the H1N1 flu, for caring for a close relative that is ill, under the Family Medical Leave Act. Employers are encouraged to develop flexible leave policies to encourage employees with flu symptoms or employees with sick families to stay home.

The Occupational Safety and Health Act provides that every employer has a general duty to maintain a safe workplace free of recognized hazards that may cause death or serious physical harm to employees. Because of this requirement, employers should have a basic plan to prevent H1N1 flu transmission, to train employees on disease avoidance, and to handle any outbreak of sickness in the workplace.

The Board has adopted policies that provide direction to departments for managing staff. These include the FMLA policy, the Alternate Work Schedule policy and Washoe County Telecommuting policy. Guidelines also are in place to assist departments. These include the Flu Season Planning Guide, Manager’s/Supervisors Guide to Appropriate Use of Sick Leave, and Guidelines for Handling Medical Information. Departments are also encouraged to review the collective bargaining agreements for more specifics regarding sick leave usage and time off.

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## 2009-2010 Influenza Season Preparation

### Resources

Below are listed some resources available to you from the government agencies referenced in this guide. In addition to these, be sure to review the existing Washoe County policies, procedures, and guidelines that may be useful to help you manage staffing issues in the event of higher than normal absenteeism and monitor the periodic communications from the District Health Department.

**Washoe County Health District:** [www.washoecounty.us/health](http://www.washoecounty.us/health)

**U.S. Government Information on Pandemic Influenza:** [www.flu.gov/](http://www.flu.gov/)

**CDC General Influenza Information:** [www.cdc.gov/flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/)

**CDC 2009 H1N1 Influenza Information:** [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/)

**OSHA's Safety & Health Guidance:** [www.osha.gov/dsg/topics/pandemicflu/index.html](http://www.osha.gov/dsg/topics/pandemicflu/index.html)

**OSHA's Guidance on Preparing Workplaces of an Influenza Pandemic:** [www.osha.gov/Publications/employers-protect-workers-flu-factsheet.html](http://www.osha.gov/Publications/employers-protect-workers-flu-factsheet.html)

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## Sample Communication to Employees

### Flu season is starting. Get ready now!

The flu season is starting and will last through the fall and winter. More than one kind of flu virus will be spreading this season, including seasonal flu and the 2009 H1N1 flu. If you get the flu, you can get sick and can spread the flu to others at home, at work, and in the community. Symptoms of flu include fever or chills *and* cough or sore throat. In addition, symptoms of flu can include runny nose, body aches, headache, tiredness, diarrhea, or vomiting.

We are asking that you plan to stay home if you are sick until at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius) or signs of a fever (have chills, feel very warm, have a flushed appearance, or are sweating). This should be determined without the use of fever-reducing medicines (any medicine that contains ibuprofen or acetaminophen).

Also remember to cover your coughs and sneezes and wash your hands often with soap and water. Use an alcohol-based hand cleaner if soap and water are not available. If a severe flu outbreak hits our community, we will take additional steps to avoid spreading the flu virus in the workplace.

You need to prepare as well.

- Review our pandemic flu response plan. *[provide information on how/where to do this]*
- Get the vaccine for seasonal flu *[insert information about vaccination clinics at the workplace or other ways your business can support getting vaccinated for seasonal flu]*
- Get the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine when it becomes available, **if** you are at higher risk for 2009 H1N1 flu complications. People at higher risk for 2009 H1N1 flu complications include pregnant women and people with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, heart disease, or diabetes). For more information about priority groups for vaccinations, visit [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/acip.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/acip.htm).
- Make plans to care for sick household members or for children if schools dismiss students or child care programs close.
- Be prepared in case you get sick and need to stay home. Have the following items on hand: a supply of fever-reducing medicines that contain acetaminophen or ibuprofen, alcohol-based hand cleaners, tissues, and other items that may be useful and help avoid the need to make trips out in public while you are sick.
- Learn about the flu and what you can do. To find out more about preparing for the flu, go to
- [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636).

If you have any questions about policies or action steps we can take, please contact *[insert name and contact information here]*.

By working together, we can protect our workforce while having a productive fall and winter.

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## 8 Ways to Stay Healthy at Work

You can protect yourself and others by following these key steps:

1. **Maintain a healthy lifestyle** through rest, diet, exercise and relaxation.
2. **Wash your hands frequently** with soap and water for 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner if soap and water are not available. Be sure to wash your hands after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
3. **Avoid touching your nose, mouth, and eyes.** Germs spread this way.
4. **Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue**, or cough and sneeze into your elbow. Dispose of tissues in no-touch trash receptacles.
5. **Keep frequently touched common surfaces clean**, such as telephones, computer keyboards, doorknobs, etc.
6. **Do not use other employees' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment.** If you need to use a co-worker's phone, desk, or other equipment, clean it first – and after.
7. **Don't spread the flu! If you are sick with flu-like symptoms, stay home.** Symptoms of flu include fever (100° F or 38° C) or chills **and** cough or sore throat. Symptoms can also include runny nose, body aches, headache, tiredness, diarrhea, or vomiting. Stay home until at least 24 hours after you are free of fever without the use of fever-reducing medicines.
8. **Get vaccinated against seasonal flu**, available now in our area. If you are at higher risk for flu complications you should receive the H1N1 flu vaccine when it becomes available. People at higher risk for H1N1 flu complications include pregnant women and people with chronic medical conditions (such as asthma, heart disease, or diabetes). For more information about priority groups for vaccination, visit [www.cdc.gov/h1n1fluvaccination/acip.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1fluvaccination/acip.htm).

# Do you feel sick?



**You may have the flu if you have fever or chills  
AND  
a cough or sore throat**

**You may also have a runny nose, body aches,  
a headache, tiredness, diarrhea, or vomiting**

**If you think you have the flu,  
tell your supervisor and stay home,  
except to get medical care.**

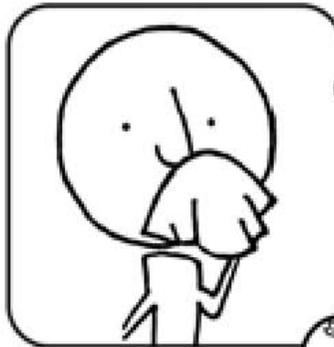
**For more information visit [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)  
or call 1 (800) CDC-INFO (232-4636)**



CS 200820-B

Stop the spread of germs that make you and others sick!

# Cover your Cough



Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze

or cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.

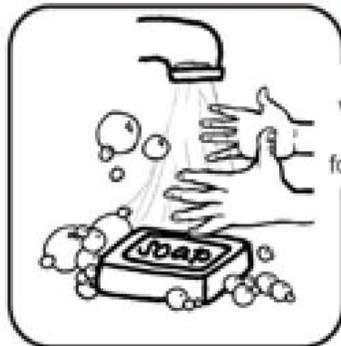


Put your used tissue in the waste basket.



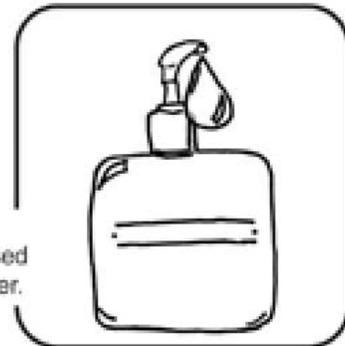
# Clean your Hands

after coughing or sneezing.



Wash hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds

or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner.



Minnesota Department of Health  
117 SE Delaware Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55434  
612-475-2414 or 1-877-475-6244  
www.health.state.mn.us

