December 2013

UTAH LABOR COMMISSION

UTAH OSHA SAFETYLINE NEWSLETTER

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Seasonal Flu Protection for Employers and Employees

Once again, it is that time of year when the flu raises its ugly head and looks for its next victims. There are some basic precautions that, as an employer, you can take to protect your workforce against the flu.

Some workplaces have an inherent higher risk to employees than other businesses such as when your employees make contact with other workers and the general public on a daily basis. The H1N1 virus (also known as swine flu) was the most common cause of human influenza in 2009. H1N1 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization in June of 2009. The H1N1 pandemic spread worldwide and caused approximately 579,000 deaths worldwide. The pandemic was declared over in August 10, 2010, since that time seventeen people have died from H1N1 in Venezuela, and an additional 250 were infected.

It is natural that the flu virus will change and new strains will appear each year. Because of this constant change in the virus a new vaccine is created each year. It is advised, by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), that everyone over the age of six months gets vaccinated each year. Encouraging your workers to get a vaccination can decrease the number of flu related absences.

Those workers who do get sick should be encouraged to stay home. The CDC recommends that workers who have a fever and respiratory symptoms stay at home until twenty-four hours after their fever ends, without the use of medication. Some workers who contract the flu will not have a fever; other symptoms could include a runny nose, body aches, headache, tiredness, diarrhea, or vomiting. Some employers have developed flexible leave policies that encourage workers to stay home, without penalty, if they are sick. Discuss other human resource policies with staff, including administrative leave transfer between employees, pay policy for sick leave, childcare options, and what to do when ill during travel.

Keeping your workplace clean helps to eliminate flu exposure to your employees. Regularly clean all frequently touched work surfaces, work areas, and equipment (e.g., telephones, doorknobs, lunch areas, countertops, copiers, etc.). Provide hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes for workers to clean their work space. Provide training to your employees on transmittal of the flu virus, and what precautions they can take to protect themselves.

Workers can protect themselves and their co-workers by covering their coughs and sneezes with a tissue, or cough and sneeze into your upper sleeve. Throw tissues in a “no-touch” wastebasket. After coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose, clean your hands. Proper hand washing

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includes rubbing soapy hands together for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol based hand rub. Try not to use a co-worker's phone, desk, office, computer, or other work tools. If you must use a phone in a common area, clean with a disinfecting wipe prior to use. Don't overlook exercise, getting plenty of rest, and eating a healthy diet, these all help your immune system ready to battle any germs you may come in contact with during your day.

Many myths have surfaced over the years regarding the flu, and the flu vaccine. According to a recent Harvard Health Publication these are the 10 most common myths and the reality behind them:

MYTH 1: You can catch the flu from the vaccine. The vaccine is made from an inactivated virus that can't transmit infection. So people who get sick after receiving a flu vaccination were going to get sick anyway. It takes a week or two to get protection from the vaccine. But people assume that because they got sick after getting the vaccine, the shot caused their illness.

MYTH 2: Healthy people don't need to be vaccinated. It's true that the flu vaccination is routinely recommended for people who have a chronic illness. But anyone—even healthy folks—can benefit from being vaccinated. Current guidelines suggest that children ages 6 months to 19 years old, pregnant women, and anyone over age 49 be vaccinated each year. In addition, the flu shot is recommended for healthy people who might spread the virus to others who are particularly susceptible. For this reason, health care workers are routinely advised to get the flu vaccination to protect their patients.

MYTH 3: Getting the flu vaccination is all you need to do to protect yourself from the flu. There are a number of steps you can take to protect yourself during flu season besides vaccination. Avoid contact with people who have the flu, wash your hands frequently, and consider taking anti-viral medications if you were exposed to the flu before being vaccinated.

MYTH 4: The flu is just a bad cold. Influenza may cause bad cold symptoms. But in the United States alone, 36,000 people die and more than 200,000 are hospitalized each year because of the flu.

MYTH 5: You can't spread the flu if you're feeling well. Actually, 20 to 30 percent of people carrying the influenza virus have no symptoms.

MYTH 6: You don't need to get a flu shot every year. The influenza virus changes (mutates) each year. So getting vaccinated each year is important to make sure you have immunity to the strains most likely to cause an outbreak.

MYTH 7: You can catch the flu from going out in cold weather without a coat, with wet hair or by sitting near a drafty window. The only way to catch the flu is by being exposed to the influenza virus. Flu season coincides with the cold weather. So people often associate the flu with a cold, drafty environment. But, they are not related.

MYTH 8: Feed a cold, starve a fever. If you have the flu (or a cold) and a fever, you need more fluids. There's little reason to increase or decrease how much you eat. Though you may have no appetite, "starving" yourself will accomplish little. And poor nutrition will not help you get better.

MYTH 9: Chicken soup will speed your recovery from the flu. Hot liquids can soothe a sore throat and provide much needed fluids. But chicken soup has no other specific qualities that can help fight the flu.

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MYTH 10: If you have a high fever with the flu that lasts more than a day or two, antibiotics may be necessary. Antibiotics work well against bacteria, but they aren't effective for a viral infection like the flu. Then again, some people develop a bacterial infection as a complication of the flu, so it may be a good idea to get checked out if your symptoms drag on or worsen.

The flu is a good example of how medical myths can get in the way of good medical care. When it's flu season, take the necessary steps to stay healthy. That includes separating fact from myth.

For more seasonal flu information, here is the link to the Centers for Disease Control's Flu Webpage: http://www.cdc.gov/flu/

Snow Safety

As the recent snow storms have shown, winter has arrived in the state of Utah. Many workers stay inside buildings and are protected from the winter hazards, but there are others who are required to go out into the storms and the chilly temperatures. For those workers who have to brave the cold here are some winter safety reminders.

Driving: Remember the three P's of safe winter driving:

Prepare for the trip; Make sure you have the necessary supplies in your vehicle in case of an emergency, check the battery, tires, coolant, windshield fluid, and your wipers.

Protect yourself; Buckle up, use child safety seats.

Prevent crashes on the road; Slow down and increase distances between cars, watch out for pedestrians, don't try to pass a snow plow, get plenty of rest prior to the trip (Drowsy Driving is a factor in more than 100,000 crashes per year).

Shoveling Snow: Drink plenty of fluids, shoveling snow is a strenuous activity that can cause dehydration, take frequent breaks to rehydrate, but avoid beverages that contain caffeine or alcohol. To avoid injuries take time to warm-up before starting, push the snow instead of lifting where possible, and use proper form if lifting is necessary (keeping the back straight and lifting with the legs.

Watch for downed or damaged power lines: Assume all power lines are energized and stay well clear of any downed or damaged power lines. Report the downed lines to the responsible authority.

Powered Equipment: It is important to make sure that powered equipment, such as chain saws or other power tools are properly grounded. When performing maintenance make sure the equipment is disconnected from any power source.

Snowblowers commonly case lacerations or amputations when operators attempt to clear jams. Never attempt to clear a jam by hand. Turn off the machine and use a long stick to clear wet snow or debris from the machine. Keep your hands a feet away from moving parts.

Clearing Snow from Roofs and Working at Heights: Every year, workers are killed or seriously injured while performing snow or ice removal from rooftops and other building structures, such as decks. Before the snow starts to accumulate, think about what will be needed to safely remove snow from roofs or other elevated surfaces:

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- Can snow be removed without workers going onto the roof?
- Are there any hazards on the roof that might become hidden by the snow and need to be marked so that workers can see them (skylights, roof drains, vents, etc.)?
- How should the snow be removed, based on the buildings layout, to prevent unbalanced loading?
- What are the maximum load limits of the roof and how do they compare with the estimated total weight of snow, snow-removal equipment, and workers on the roof?
- What tools equipment, protective devices, clothing and footwear will workers need?
- What type of fall protection will be used to protect workers on roofs and other elevated surfaces?
- What training will workers need to work safely?
- How will mechanized snow removal equipment be safely elevated to the roof?
- How will you protect people on the ground from snow and ice falling off the roof during removal operations?

Whenever possible, use methods to clear ice and snow without workers going on the roof. Use ladders to apply de-icing materials, use snow rakes or drag lines from the ground, or use an aerial lift. These methods do have their own hazards to workers, such as electrical hazards, falls from aerial lifts (make sure workers in the lift are trained in the correct fall protection to use and how to take care of that equipment), and ladder falls, please take all necessary precautions to protect your employees.

For additional information on the hazards of snow removal from roofs see the OSHA Hazard Alert at: https://www.osha.gov/dts/weather/winter_storm/snow_hazard_alert.html

Compliance Corner

Question: Concerning 1910.23(e)(3)(v)(a), can a 4' wide section of guard rail be replaced with removable chains to allow pallets to be frequently put in place and removed with forklifts? We are not sure if chain (or plastic coated chain) qualifies as smooth top.

Answer: Utah Occupational Safety and Health (Utah OSHA) allows the use of chain and/or plastic coated chain to be used as a barrier (top rail), providing that;

- The chain is in good condition with no dings or spurs on any of the links which could cause cut or injury to the employee.
- The access openings are appropriately guarded when not in use
- The chain has to be at a height of 42” and cannot sag below 39”, same as a standardrail.
- When in place at the opening, as a barrier, the chain is capable of withstanding a load of at least 200 pounds applied in any direction (except upward) at any point on the corresponding member.

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