

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**NOVEL H1N1 FLU
COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT FOR BUSINESSES PRESENTED**

(RICHMOND, Va.)— State Health Commissioner Karen Remley, MD, MBA addressed an audience of 725 Human Resource professionals at the Virginia Society for Human Resource Managers (SHRM) conference in Virginia Beach where she presented a novel H1N1 communication toolkit for businesses. Joining Dr. Remley was Cindy Hale, President of Virginia SHRM.

Dr. Remley said “It is difficult to predict the severity of illness the novel H1N1 flu will cause, therefore businesses should plan to respond in a flexible way and be prepared to take additional steps to decrease the spread of flu in the workplace.” Dr. Remley also stated, “Public health communicators realize that in addition to traditional fact sheets, posters and brochures, various forms of templated social media tools such as text messages, eCards, e-mails, and website widgets are needed to meet the demands of today’s audiences.”

“Employers, in general, play a key role in protecting employees' health and safety, as well as in limiting the negative impact of influenza outbreaks on the individual, the community, and the nation’s economy,” stated Ms. Hale. “Employers who have developed pandemic plans should review and revise their plans as outlined in the toolkit in light of the current novel H1N1 influenza outbreak,” she added.

Consistent messaging is important and the Department of Health cannot reach everyone to raise awareness of this issue. “We see it as our obligation as Human Resource professionals to use the recommendations provided in the toolkit to ensure a minimal impact to our staff and our community,” remarked Ms. Hale.

Actions employers should take include:

Encourage your employees to get their seasonal flu vaccination now and their novel H1N1 vaccination when it becomes available.

- Review or establish a flexible pandemic influenza plan and involve your employees in developing and reviewing your plan.
- Conduct a focused discussion or exercise using your plan, to find out ahead of time whether the plan has gaps or problems that need to be corrected.
- Have an understanding of your organization’s normal seasonal absenteeism rates and know how to monitor for any unusual increases in absenteeism through the fall and winter.

- Engage the Virginia Department of Health and local health departments to confirm channels of communication and methods for dissemination of local outbreak information.
- Allow sick workers to stay home without fear of losing their jobs.
- Develop other flexible leave policies to allow workers to stay home to care for sick family members or for children if schools dismiss students or child care programs close.
- Share your pandemic influenza plan with employees and explain what human resources policies, workplace and leave flexibilities, and pay and benefits will be available to them.
- Share best practices with other businesses in your communities (especially those in your supply chain), chambers of commerce, and associations to improve community response efforts.

Commissioner Remley added, “We need to remain vigilant against the spread of the disease. We are focused on monitoring the activity of the virus in our state and on reducing its impact, especially among those at highest risk for complications.”

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For more information, go to:

Virginia Department of Health – H1N1

www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/DiseasePrevention/H1N1/index.htm

Hotline: 1-877-ASK-VDH3 (1-877-275-8343)

SHRM H1N1 Flu Resources

www.shrm.org/hrdisciplines/safetysecurity/articles/Pages/SwineFluNewsResources.aspx

Communication Toolkit for Businesses and Employers

www.flu.gov/professional/business/toolkit.pdf

2009 H1N1 Flu Resources for Businesses and Employers

www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/business