



# PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
Contact: Dawn Dudley

Date: 08/28/09  
Phone: 560-0008/Fax: 560-0020  
E-mail: [ddudley@durhamcountync.gov](mailto:ddudley@durhamcountync.gov)

## **Public Health Warns Employers about the Impact of H1N1**

**Durham, N.C.** – Novel H1N1, the new influenza virus being spread among humans, is increasingly threatening people from all populations. Each week as guidance on how to address the virus is updated, the Durham County Public Health Department collaborates with community partners to get vital information relayed to the Durham community. Most recently, Public Health is taking a special interest in educating local employers about the potential impact of H1N1 in the work place.

Public health advises employers of all sizes that the impact of H1N1 on a business can be debilitating. In the workplace, many people can quickly become sick as the virus can be easily transmitted among employees. Large number of absences can affect usual business operations. Gayle Harris, Health Director, urges businesses to have a business continuity plan in place should normal business operations be affected by employee absences.

Spread of the H1N1 virus is thought to occur in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something – such as a surface or object – with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. To protect employees from becoming sick, employers are encouraged to communicate and practice flu prevention measures as well as develop and regularly update their business continuity plan in response to the H1N1 virus.

Employers are encouraged to routinely clean commonly touched surfaces and communicate health and safety tips to their employees. Tips to protect employees include:

- Employees should always cover their cough and sneeze with a tissue or use their upper sleeve. Dispose of used tissues in a trashcan and wash hands.
- Employees should regularly wash their hands with soap and water. If that is not possible, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- All people with flu-like symptoms should stay home and away from the workplace until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever without fever-reducing medication.

Include health messages on your employee website or post in highly visible areas. To download health and safety tips on novel H1N1 as well as information on business continuity planning, employers can visit the [Durham County Public Health Website](#). At the site, information is available along with links to other healthcare authorities such as the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Going into the fall season, illness from novel H1N1 flu is expected to markedly increase. Durham County Public Health urges employers to prepare for increased employee absences and the potential impact to business operations.

For more information about how employers can prepare for H1N1 in the workplace, call **Durham County Health Department Information Line at 919-560-7882**. Callers must leave a message and a County Communicable Disease Control Nurse will return the call.

###