



CHCHD News

Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department

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Employers and Schools Encouraged to Consider Flexible Leave and Attendance Policies to Protect Staff and Students Against the Spread of Flu

Chattanooga, TN- Flu season often results in increased employee and student illness and absenteeism throughout our community. Seasonal flu, coupled with the newly emergent H1N1 virus, has the potential to affect many more Hamilton County citizens this year. The Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department encourages all residents to be vigilant about practicing measures that are intended to slow the spread of illness. Schools, businesses and employers play a key role in protecting both the health of the community and employees' health.

Hamilton County businesses and schools are strongly urged to plan for the upcoming flu season by instituting flexible leave policies and implementing protective health measures in order to help limit the spread of illness, lessen the impact on the economy, and keep our community functioning normally. Employers and schools should plan now to allow and encourage sick workers and students to stay home and ensure that sick leave and attendance policies are flexible and allow for adequate recovery from illness. It is also important for employers to share plans with employees, specifically regarding leave flexibility, pay, and benefits that will be available to them.

"Schools and employers in Hamilton County should have specific plans for the ways they plan to protect employees and students while maintaining operations during this flu season," says Becky Barnes, Administrator for the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department. "Now is the time to utilize existing plans or develop plans that allow flexible leave policies so that employers and schools can help to stop the spread of illness and keep our community functioning as normal as possible."

According to recommendations provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, businesses and schools are strongly encouraged to send home employees and students who exhibit flu-like symptoms. Those who have flu-like symptoms should stay home and not come to work until they have been fever free for 24 hours. For most people, this will be 3-5 days. **A doctor's note should not be required for students or employees who are out with flu-like illness just to validate their illness or ability to return.** Non-necessary visits to doctor's offices and medical facilities take time away from individuals that are in need of medical care.

Steps for Businesses and Schools to Keep Illness from Spreading:

- Cover coughs and sneezes
 - Make tissues easily available to employees and students
- Encourage frequent handwashing
 - Maintain adequate supplies of soap and water
 - Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer in areas where soap and water aren't readily accessible
 - Place posters encouraging handwashing in common areas
- Regularly clean surfaces and items that are touched

- Promote influenza vaccinations for employees and students
 - Seasonal influenza vaccinations are available in many places now
 - Encourage employees to get the H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available to them. Consider granting employees time off to get vaccinated.

To see Hamilton County General Government's amended workplace leave policies and flu employee information, visit <http://health.hamiltontn.gov>. To learn more about minimizing the risk of illness for employees and students or how to prepare your business or school for flu season, visit www.flu.gov/professional/business or <http://flu.gov/professional/school>. You can also contact the Health Department at 209-8393.

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