

Preparing for a Pandemic – State Employees Human Resources – FAQ's

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The General questions numbered 1 through 6 were prepared with assistance from the Arizona Department of Health Services.

GENERAL

1. Why do I keep hearing the terms "avian flu" and "influenza pandemic"?

Answer: There has been, and continues to be, a growing concern worldwide about the possibility of an influenza pandemic. A lot of information is available (not all of it accurate), but according to the federal government's flu information, avian (or bird) flu is caused by an influenza virus that occurs naturally among wild birds. The current bird flu outbreak in Asia includes domestic chickens and ducks. An influenza pandemic is a global outbreak of disease from a new influenza; a virus that is unlike past influenza viruses. Because people have not been infected with a similar virus in the past, most or all people will not have any natural immunity (protection) to a new pandemic virus.

2. What is the difference between seasonal flu, bird flu and an influenza pandemic?

Answer:

Seasonal (or common) flu is a respiratory illness that can be transmitted person to person. Most people have some immunity, and a vaccine is available.

Avian (or bird) flu (also referred to as the H5N1 flu strain) is caused by influenza viruses that occur naturally among wild birds. The virus

is deadly to domestic fowl and can be transmitted from birds to humans. There is no human immunity to this virus and no vaccine is available. However, the Avian flu virus cannot easily be transmitted from person to person.

Influenza pandemic occurs when there is a worldwide outbreak of severe flu caused by a virus that is new to humans. Influenza pandemics occur when a new or markedly changed virus develops. Because some flu viruses develop and are very different from any virus seen before, there is no natural immunity (defenses) in the human population, and the disease can spread easily from person to person. In an influenza pandemic, many people could get sick at the same time, and many could die.

3. What is the State of Arizona doing to prepare for a possible influenza pandemic?

Answer: In Arizona, the Governor's Office, the Arizona Department of Health Services, the Arizona Department of Agriculture, and the Arizona Department of Game & Fish have all been involved in influenza pandemic preparedness. The Arizona Department of Health Services (DHS) has prepared an Influenza Pandemic Response Plan, which can be viewed on DHS's web site: <http://www.azdhs.gov/pandemicflu>

4. When will an influenza pandemic get to Arizona?

Answer: No one can predict when an influenza pandemic will occur or how fast it will spread across the world.

5. Where can I learn more about the Avian flu and the possibility of an influenza pandemic?

Answer: Additional, more specific information, including recommendations for individual and family preparedness, can be obtained from the following web sites:

- Federal government - www.avianflu.gov or www.pandemicflu.gov
- The Center for Disease Control (CDC) – www.cdc.gov

- CDC Hotline: **1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)**. TTY: **1-888-232-6348**. This line is available in English and Spanish, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Questions can be e-mailed to cdcinfo@cdc.gov.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) – www.who.int/en/
- Arizona Department of Health Services – www.azdhs.gov/pandemicflu

6. How can I better prepare in the event an influenza pandemic hits Arizona?

Answer: You are encouraged to educate yourself regarding the potential risks of an influenza pandemic and how to prepare--now. Preparation should include planning for potential illnesses and the need for leave should you or your family members become ill.

LEAVE

1. What type of leave is available to me in case of an influenza pandemic under the current Personnel Rules?

Answer: There are no statutes or policies establishing special types of leave in case of an influenza pandemic. All currently available forms of leave may be considered in the event of an influenza pandemic. For further information review the Personnel Rules covering the following types of leave.

- Sick leave
- Family sick leave (40 hours to care for child, spouse or parent)
- Annual leave
- Compensatory leave
- Donated annual leave
- Leave without pay
- Medical leave without pay

NOTE: Depending on the circumstances, leave taken due to the flu may qualify as Family and Medical Leave Act leave. Each leave category mentioned above has a personnel rule associated with it. Please review the appropriate personnel rule for further information regarding each leave

category or contact your agency human resources office for further information.

2. If I'm not sick, but I do not want to come to work for fear of becoming ill, are agencies required to authorize annual or compensatory leave?

Answer:

- First, obtaining clear, accurate information regarding the situation is critical.
- Agencies are not required to provide annual leave.
- In accordance with the federal Fair Labor Standards Act, if the use of compensatory leave will unduly disrupt the operations of the agency, the request for use of compensatory leave may also be denied. However, employees may be permitted to use such time within a reasonable period after making the request.
- Agencies are under no obligation to accommodate such fears. However, no one can predict the severity of an influenza pandemic. Depending on the circumstances, agency management may want to discuss the situation with you. Alternative work schedules and telecommuting are options that may become appropriate to review and consider.

3. What if I use public transportation to travel to and from work, and, due to an influenza pandemic, the public transit system shuts down and I am unable to get to work, will I get paid for the day(s) I'm unable to get to work?

Answer:

- Agency directors have the authority under Personnel Rule R2-5-409 to authorize an employee to be absent with pay on **administrative leave** in emergency situations such as malfunction of publicly-owned or controlled equipment.
- Also, agencies may authorize employees to work from home, if employees' positions allow them to accomplish work from home.

4. If I am out of the office on some type of paid leave or I am able to work but other employees are granted administrative leave due to an emergency situation, will I be granted paid administrative leave too?

Answer: No.

- 5. In addition to emergency situations, are there other situations that may occur during an influenza pandemic that authorize agency directors to grant paid administrative leave?**

Answer:

- Yes, an agency director may authorize employees to be absent with pay on administrative leave during a state of emergency declared by the Governor.
- However, if an influenza pandemic reaches Arizona, it is unknown whether it will rise to the level of a state of emergency.

- 6. If I do not have enough leave to cover influenza pandemic-related absences, how can I afford to remain home until completely well before returning to work?**

Answer:

- You are encouraged to educate yourself regarding the potential risks of an influenza pandemic and how to prepare--now.
- You should stay home when you are sick or have flu symptoms.

- 7. Are there any alternative compensation/leave policies being instituted to address this issue?**

Answer: No, not at this time.

- 8. What if a co-worker comes to work ill, can he be ordered to leave the work premises?**

Answer: Yes.

- 9. What if I become ill but I am unable to contact my supervisor, will I lose my job?**

Answer:

- If you are unable to contact your supervisor because you are incapacitated, request a family member or friend to contact your

supervisor. If this is not possible, contact your supervisor as soon as possible.

- If phone service in the area has been affected, try to find an alternative method of contact.
- If you or a member of your immediate family is seriously ill, you may be eligible for leave under the provisions of the Family & Medical Leave Act. In an influenza pandemic situation, which most of us have not experienced before, a number of different and unanticipated events may be occurring, which could be affecting the basic infrastructure of the Valley, including telephone lines, transportation, and postal services.
- If it is determined that a separation for abandonment is the appropriate action, you will receive notification.

EMPLOYMENT AND STAFFING

1. Can I be transferred within my agency to another position? What about to another agency?

Answer:

- Yes. Permanent status employees may be **transferred** by an agency director to a position in the same pay grade within the agency. Employees must meet qualifications.
- Permanent status employees may also be **non-competitively special detailed** to positions for six months, without regard to grade or qualifications.
- Employees may request to be **transferred** from one **agency to another agency**, in the same grade, provided they meet the qualifications, and,
- Permanent status employees may also be assigned to uncovered positions under a mobility assignment with concurrence of the employee, the agency director and ADOA Director. If the mobility assignment is to another agency, the concurrence of the gaining agency director is also necessary.

NOTE: Agencies must also follow any policies, statutes and rules regarding appointments, background checks, finger printing requirements, licensure, etc.

WORK SCHEDULES/ALTERNATIVE WORKSITES

- 1. I heard some information regarding scheduling employees in shifts, how will this help in the case of an influenza pandemic?**

Answer: Fewer employees in more shifts mean less exposure to the illness.

- 2. What if a large percentage of my co-workers become ill, what is the maximum number of overtime hours I can be required to work?**

Answer:

- There is no limit to the number of hours your agency can require you to work.
- If you are a non-exempt employee, your agency is required to pay you overtime in the form of pay or compensatory leave for hours worked in excess of 40 per work week.
- If you are a covered, exempt employee, your agency is required to provide hour for hour compensatory leave for hours worked in excess of 40 per work week.
- If you are an uncovered, excluded employee, you do not receive any overtime or compensatory leave.

- 3. I have been identified as providing critical business functions for my agency, what is the maximum number of hours I can be required to work?**

Answer:

- There is no limit to the number of hours your agency can require you to work.
- If you are a non-exempt employee, your agency is required to pay you overtime in the form of pay or compensatory leave for hours worked in excess of 40 per work week.
- If you are a covered, exempt employee, your agency is required to provide hour for hour compensatory leave for hours worked in excess of 40 per work week.
- If you are an uncovered, excluded employee, you do not receive any overtime or compensatory leave.

- Knowing that you provide a critical business function and your roles and responsibilities, prior to any type of emergency, is important. For planning purposes, discuss with your supervisor any concerns or constraints you may have should an emergency arise.

4. Can you please explain social distancing as it relates to an influenza pandemic situation, what exactly is it, how will it help?

Answer: Social distancing means restricting physical contact such as handshakes, hugs, etc. It also involves limiting use of closed meeting rooms and large meetings. Employees should be educated to maintain a reasonable distance from each other as far as possible. (5 feet is recommended.)

WELLNESS

1. Isn't there a flu vaccine already available and will it prevent an influenza pandemic?

Answer: There is a vaccine available that prevents seasonal flu. No vaccine is currently available for influenza pandemic. However, the seasonal flu vaccine may lessen the symptoms of an influenza pandemic.

2. Will there be enough seasonal flu vaccine available this year?

Answer: All indications from the Centers for Disease Control are that there will be an ample supply of flu vaccine available. Although there have been supply and shipment issues in the past several years, the CDC and manufacturers have made changes to ease these issues.

Influenza viruses change from year to year, so influenza vaccines must be updated annually to include the viruses that will most likely circulate in the upcoming season. There is a very tight timeline for selecting the influenza vaccine virus strains, preparing the vaccine (which is a very complex process), manufacturing, and distributing the vaccine. Due to the time constraints, any problems encountered during the process may cause shortages or delays. In addition, the

number of companies that manufacture influenza vaccine for the U.S. is small so problems with production for any company can have substantial impact on supply.

CDC is assessing the distribution of influenza vaccine and will continue to work with manufacturers and our partners to find solutions to the challenges we face related to matching influenza vaccine supplies with demand at national, state, community, and provider levels.

3. Is there a vaccine for an influenza pandemic?

Answer: No. There is currently no vaccine available to protect humans against an influenza pandemic; however research is being conducted to determine if one could be available. In the event of an influenza pandemic, it will likely spread so rapidly from the source that vaccine availability may be delayed for months after major outbreaks begin. In addition, much of the population will be totally susceptible. The virus needs to show itself before a vaccine can be made. However, employees are encouraged to get an annual seasonal flu vaccine, as it may lessen the symptoms of an influenza pandemic.

4. If a vaccine for an influenza pandemic is developed, will it be offered free to me on my health plan?

Answer: If a vaccine is developed and the State is able to obtain the vaccine, the Wellness program will make every effort to make it available to you. At this time, it is not known whether an influenza pandemic vaccine would be free to employees.

5. I've been told there is an anti-viral available to reduce the effects of the flu, will it reduce the effects of an influenza pandemic?

Answer: There is an anti-viral available, Tamiflu. However, it reduces the effects of the seasonal flu. It is not known whether Tamiflu will reduce the effects of an influenza pandemic. Although, it is believed that it may lessen the symptoms of it.

6. Is there enough seasonal flu anti-viral available?

Answer: Manufacturers are currently producing Tamiflu to prepare for the flu season. Whether there will be enough Tamiflu available is not known. Tamiflu requires a prescription from a physician.

7. Is there an anti-viral available to reduce the symptoms of an influenza pandemic? If so, will the health plan cover it?

Answer: There is no anti-viral to reduce the symptoms of an influenza pandemic. However, the CDC indicates that there is a fair amount of research happening in this area, as an anti-viral is more feasible to produce than a vaccine. If one becomes available, the health plan will release information regarding covering the prescription.

8. What is the difference between a vaccine and an anti-viral medication?

Answer:

- Vaccines** prevent illness. Vaccines produce antibodies against the virus it's made for, providing immunity against the virus. While there is currently a vaccine for the seasonal flu, there is not a vaccine for an influenza pandemic.
- Anti-virals** are medications used for the early treatment of influenza. Anti-virals work by reducing the ability of the virus to reproduce but do not prevent or provide immunity against the virus. If taken shortly after getting sick (within 48 hours), anti-virals can reduce influenza symptoms, shorten the length of illness and reduce the serious complications of influenza. Anti-virals will likely be the only medical intervention available during the initial influenza pandemic response.

9. If an influenza pandemic materializes, what can I do to reduce my risks?

Answer: The Arizona Department of Health Services advises:

- **Stay informed.**
Regularly updated information about bird flu and pandemic flu:
[World Health Organization](#)
[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#):
 - [Spread of Avian Influenza Viruses among Birds](#)
 - [Avian Influenza Vaccines](#)
 - [Avian Influenza A Viruses](#)

Information on the vaccine development process: [National Institutes of Health](#)

- **Stop germs from spreading.**
Cover your mouth and nose with tissue when coughing and sneezing.
Wash your hands often.
Stay home when you are sick.

10. How can I have two to three months of my on-going maintenance medications available in case I need to stay home during an influenza pandemic?

Answer: A convenient and less expensive mail-order service is available for members who require medications for ongoing health conditions or who are going to be in an area with no participating retail pharmacy for an extended period of time. It is suggested you set this up prior to an influenza pandemic. You can find the guidelines and instructions to do so on the Benefit Options website www.benefitoptions.az.gov or by calling your benefits representative.

HEALTH INSURANCE AND OTHER BENEFITS

1. Will my health plan cover medical expenses associated with an influenza pandemic?

Answer: Yes, the health plan will pay for costs associated with an influenza pandemic, as long as you and your dependents are covered on the plan.

2. If I am ill and apply for short term disability benefits, will short term disability benefits be reinstated if I become reinfected?

Answer: Yes, if you are reinfected within 30 days. If you are reinfected after 30 days from the day they returned to work from the first infection, you will need to re-apply for benefits.

3. Will the health plan cover Tamiflu, if my physician prescribes it?

Answer: Yes. However, Tamiflu will not prevent an influenza pandemic; it will only help the symptoms after you have been infected.

EMPLOYEE SERVICES

1. Should an influenza pandemic strike Arizona, what assistance will be available to help me cope with its impact emotionally and financially?

Answer: The State of Arizona provides resources to help employees and eligible dependents cope through its Employee Assistance Programs (EAP). The EAP provides free, confidential, short-term counseling to help identify concerns. When needed, the EAP may refer you to an outside program that can assist you and/or your dependents.

Employees can reach the Agency's Employee Assistance Program at the phone numbers listed below:

Agency Employee Assistance Programs:

AHCCCS (Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System)	ComPsych	1-866-379-0245
DE (Education)	EAP Preferred	602-264-4600
DEQ (Environmental Quality)	ComPsych	800-272-7255
DES (Department of Economic Security)	ComPsych	1-888-243-8200
DOT (Transportation)	Contact	1-800-222-8335
DOC (Corrections)	On-site Assistance	1-520-623-5832
ADOA*	ComPsych	X220 1-877-327-2362

***Agencies not specifically listed above should call the ADOA office number.**

2. What financial resources are available to employees facing financial hardship during an influenza pandemic?

Answer:

- Employees may apply to Employees Helping Employees for financial assistance. Employees generously contribute to Employees Helping Employees (EHE), an employee-run foundation that helps employees when they need short-term financial assistance. Additional information can be obtained at <http://www.azehe.org>.

- Employees may also find additional Community based resources through the Work/Life website at <http://www.hr.state.az.us/worklife> and then Clicking on Resources and then Community Resources. There are a number of emergency community based resources listed.

- Many other resources can be found at AZ 2-1-1. AZ 2-1-1 is the doorway to thousands of health, human service and emergency response resources. It is also your source for State and local emergency bulletins and alerts vital in times of disaster or emergency. From finding child care, jobs, health care, insurance to information about safety in our homes and offices. <http://www.az211.gov>

COMMUNICATION

1. Will there be a primary source of information for employees and health plan members? (i.e. hotline, website)

Answer: Development of hotlines, employee blogs, websites, etc. is currently being discussed. More information will be shared as developments occur.

2. When should I begin educating myself and my family regarding the potential of an influenza pandemic?

Answer: You are encouraged to educate yourself and your family regarding the potential risks of an influenza pandemic and how to prepare--now. Preparation should include planning for potential illnesses and the need for leave should you or your family members become ill.

3. Do I need to plan for an influenza pandemic?

Answer: Yes. In the event of a pandemic, you will play a key role in protecting you and your family's health and safety. Planning for an influenza pandemic is critical. To assist you in your efforts, the Arizona Department of Health Services has developed a checklist. It identifies important, specific activities you can do now to prepare. The checklist can be obtained at <http://www.azdhs.gov/pandemicflu>

4. I understand that employees can be required to work overtime, beyond their normal work hours, what is the best way to approach my supervisor regarding family commitments during these situations, particularly if I have been identified as an employee who provides critical business functions?

Answer:

- While there is no limit to the number of hours an employer can require you to work, if the situation allows and there is more than one employee in the same classification qualified to do the work, your agency may assign overtime in the following order:
 - To those employees who requested overtime,
 - On a rotational basis among those who are willing to work overtime,
 - Or on a rotational basis in the absence of the first two alternatives.
- Non-exempt employees are required to receive overtime in the form of pay or compensatory leave for hours worked in excess of 40 per work week.
- Covered, exempt employees are required to receive hour for hour compensatory leave for hours worked in excess of 40 per work week.

- Uncovered, excluded employees do not receive any overtime or compensatory leave.

COMPENSATION

- 1. Will the State offer employees who are well a pay incentive to come to work?**

Answer: At this time, there is nothing that authorizes such a pay incentive.

WORKER'S COMPENSATION

- 1. If I believe I caught the flu from another employee or one of our customers/clients, can I file a claim with Worker's Compensation?**

Answer: You should report your desire to file a worker's compensation claim with your supervisor who will complete an accident report form. However, ADOA Risk Management will determine whether the claim is valid.