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Update on Influenza Pandemic

At a Glance: The H1N1 Influenza has been so active that President Barack Obama signed a national emergency declaration on H1N1 influenza over the weekend to accommodate American health care facilities' ability to address the pandemic. The declaration grants authority to the Department of Health and Human Services to waive legal requirements and gives medical facilities the ability to set up alternate care sites, modify patient triage protocols, alter patient transfer procedures and other actions to employ disaster operations and relief.

The Issue: for the week ending October 17, 2009, Influenza activity again increased over the previous week

- Visits to doctors for ILI (influenza like illnesses) increased steeply, and are now 3 times higher than normal for this time of year – 7.1% of visits were for ILI vs. a normal baseline of 2.3%
- Hospital stays are also increasing, and are higher than expected for this time of year
- Deaths increased again this week and have been above normal for several weeks
- Both Seasonal and H1N1 vaccines are difficult to find, but the CDC expects over 100 million doses to be available
- Both vaccinations remain effective against the virus, as do the anti-viral medications taken to fight the effects of the virus

Am I Impacted? We are already experiencing peak flu season, but it's still two months early – the regular "seasonal" influenza has barely begun. That means if you haven't gotten prepared at your workplace, there is still time and the effort is still worth it.

US Foodservice Position: US Foodservice has been planning for this epidemic for months. We have been preparing for staffing shortages, listening to the needs of our customers, and focusing on keeping our employees healthy. Useful information, links, and planning tools are available at our public website www.USFoodservice.com.

What You Can Do:

- Get vaccinated – both seasonal and H1N1 – as soon as possible
- Encourage your employees and family to get vaccinated
- Stress hand washing like never before, and, if possible, make hand sanitizers available to employees and customers
- Persons who think they may have become, or are becoming, ill with influenza should stay home
- Stay away from sick people
- Learn – and teach employees – about sneeze etiquette to reduce the spread of virus particles

Finally, count on U.S. Foodservice to keep you informed, and to always be your Partner Beyond the Plate.