



Law Matters Newsletter

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Are you SURE that's Hay Fever.....?



News that a summer associate at a US law firm may have swine flu ties in with the appearance of hand sanitising gel in the office washrooms. Last week I saw a gentleman at Frankfurt airport in a face mask.

It is difficult to know how an employer should react to the threat of a swine flu pandemic. It may be as over hyped as the Millennium Bug. Again, Spanish flu killed some 20-40 million people worldwide in 1918-19, more than the Great War. At present there is no need for panic, but the issue needs to be addressed now.

What to do

- 1. Find out** Visit www.direct.gov.uk/en/Swineflu, which has links to Business Link and from there to the HSE and NHS. Access the information relevant to your firm, including an NHS booklet of advice on pandemics.
- 2. Risk Assessment** Assess the risk in a structured way, possibly using the framework in the NHS document. Include the risk of both catching flu and passing it on, whether to colleagues or to clients. Think about ways of reducing the risk, and how the risk may change over time. What is the risk to your firm if a major client is affected, or if the transport system or electricity supply fails? What if the entire accounts department is sick at the same time?
- 3. Contingency Planning** Add this to your business continuity plan, if it is not there already. Decide how to cope with various scenarios. Ensure the plan is widely understood and distributed. If the man with the plan is the man with the flu, it will not work.
- 4. Precautions** Granny was right. Cover your face when you sneeze, preferably with a tissue which is then disposed of properly. Wash your hands regularly in soap and water. Do not patronise colleagues, but print out a list of precautions if they are concerned.

If someone has flu like symptoms, do not expect them to soldier on, but send them home, and ensure that they stay there until they are well. Call the swine flu information line on 0800 1 513 513 for up to date information.

- 5. Review** This is a developing situation, so keep your risk assessment and contingency plan under regular review, even if you decide that nothing has changed.

This note is written as a general guide only, and is not applicable to every firm or circumstance. It should not be relied upon as a substitute for specific business, medical or legal advice.