



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

SEP 17 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: All USDA Employees

FROM: Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Vilsack", written over the printed name of the Secretary of Agriculture.

SUBJECT: Preparations for the Flu Season

A second wave of H1N1 influenza has begun in the United States. Many of you and your families may already have been affected by the spread of the H1N1 virus within your own communities. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is well prepared to protect its workforce and continue its vital mission as the country faces the challenge of potentially widespread influenza transmission.

Let me assure you that your health and well-being during this time are my highest priorities. We have been in, and will continue, conversations with unions representing USDA employees as we prepare for the flu season. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has issued recent guidance for businesses and employers that addresses such key topics as reducing transmission among staff, facilities cleaning, and the use of social distancing. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has issued guidance to agencies regarding pay and leave policies, telecommuting, and other flexibilities to be considered under pandemic influenza conditions. These guidance documents can be found at www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu, www.opm.gov/h1n1flu, and www.chcoc.gov. USDA will follow CDC and OPM guidance on these important issues, and I urge all employees, managers, and agency leaders to review this information.

USDA is a large department with diverse offices and operations in many communities throughout the United States and around the world. Influenza rates and impact will vary across locations, necessitating significant decisionmaking at the local level. It is my expectation that these decisions will be consistent with CDC and OPM guidance and that they will be made fairly and without discrimination.

During this time, I ask you to consider what you can do to help protect yourselves, your coworkers, and the mission that we serve. Actions such as washing your hands, covering your cough or sneeze, and staying home when you are sick will go a long way in helping reduce the spread of influenza in our workplace. We are exploring ways to facilitate vaccinations against H1N1 as we receive more information regarding vaccine availability. Familiarizing yourself with your agency's plan for maintaining essential functions will strengthen our collective ability to continue the important work our Department does, every day in every way.