

Statement on Influenza A H1N1 Virus

In light of the recent increased incidence of the Influenza A H1N1 Virus in Trinidad and Tobago, Employers and Employees are requested to take responsible steps to prevent the spread of the virus in the workplace and promote a protocol of non-discrimination among persons infected or affected by the virus.

In this regard, all persons should practice increased standards of hygiene and demonstrate alertness to the symptoms of the virus as outlined in previous and continued statements and bulletins issued by the Ministry of Health.

All Employers and Employees should also be aware of the provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 2004 and in particular the under-mentioned.

Responsibility of Employers:

It is the responsibility of each Employer to, among other things:

- Ensure as far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of all employees.” (Section 6(1))

- To conduct his undertaking in such a way as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons not in his employment, who may be affected thereby are not thereby exposed to risks to their safety or health (Section 7 (1))

Employers should therefore ensure that all employees, in particular those who interface with the public, are familiar with the symptoms of the virus and are provided with adequate protection and facilities

Responsibility of the Employees

It is the responsibility of each employee among other things:

- to take reasonable care for the safety and health of himself and of other persons who may be affected by his acts or omissions at work. (Section 10 (1) a)

- to co-operate with his employer as regards any duty or requirement imposed on the employer, so far as necessary to ensure that, that duty or requirement is performed or complied with. (Section 10 (1)b)

Employees are therefore urged to co-operate with their employers in these circumstances and to immediately:

- inform the employer if symptoms of the virus are evident and
- to seek medical attention

Intervention now is critical to reduce the rate of spread of the virus at the workplace, home and community. We ask that individuals, workplaces and the community take responsibility for continued education, practice increased standards of hygiene and demonstrate alertness to the symptoms of the virus.

Consequently, Employers and Employees are requested to apply the above provisions in a humane and responsible manner with a view to preventing the spread of the virus whilst ensuring that there is a minimal loss to both the Employer and the Employee.

Accordingly we reiterate the advice placed on the Ministry of Health and Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA) Websites and suggest that it would be helpful to:

- Minimise the incidence of employees and the public entering the workplace with virus type symptoms
- Encourage frequent cleaning of surfaces
- Maintain clean work areas
- Emphasize respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene at all times
- Provide hand hygiene facilities: example hand sanitizers, soap and disposable hand towels
- Exercise care when using publicly shared equipment/instruments eg. keyboards, ATM facilities, pens and telephones.

Please note:

Additional information may be obtained from www.ttosha.com and www.health.gov.tt - these authorities maintain the responsibility for providing guidelines under their relevant legislation.