

## April 2009

### Swine Flu

Employers must be ready to respond to a potential swine flu pandemic.

Senior public policy adviser Ben Willmott, from the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) advised firms to “put in place strategies to allow them to run on skeleton staff levels” in case of an outbreak of the virus in the UK.

He urged organisations to maximise the potential of homeworking, video links and teleconferencing to reduce the amount of face-to-face contact.

“In the case of a pandemic, employers should also formulate clear advice for staff on symptoms of the virus and the importance of staying at home and seeking medical advice at the soonest opportunity,” he added.

Experts have said it is too early to assess the situation fully, although the World Health Organization has raised its alert level to five – one step short of declaring a pandemic.

Most cases around the world so far appear to be mild but in Mexico over 150 people are suspected to have died from the virus.

The UK government has said it is well prepared to deal with an outbreak of swine flu and advised against all but essential travel to Mexico.

Employment lawyers have warned that if employers fail to put in place contingency plans for an outbreak, they could leave themselves open to claims.

Marc Meryon, employment partner at Bircham Dyson Bell said organisations should be aware of their duty of care to employees. Risks of liability included discrimination for treating staff inconsistently, damages for failing to follow government guidance and breach of data protection laws for refusing to allow staff time off.

“Legally we are operating in somewhat uncharted territory. However there are definite obligations that all employers have towards their workforce and by addressing certain key issues this will reduce the risk of potential litigation,” he said.

Article summarised from People Management

<http://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/pm/articles/2009/04/cipd-urges-preparation-for-potential-swine-flu-outbreak.htm>



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