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Protect yourself from swine flu at work

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KEITH LANDRY | FOX 35 News

ORLANDO, Fla. (WOFL FOX 35) - Surveys show many American businesses are not ready for the spike in swine flu cases that are expected in the coming months. There are things you can do at work to reduce the risk of you getting sick from a co-worker.

Karla Osorio works at U.S. Health Works, a health clinic in Orange County. She comes in contact with patients and co-workers all day long, and she does all she can to keep her work station clean. "I have small children, so I'm always thinking about it and just trying to be as cautious as I can," she says.

Dr. William Newsome says if you sanitize your work station and cover your coughs, you're in luck because the H1N1 or Swine flu virus is not transmitted by casual contact. "It's those immediate close contacts where you have the greatest risk of it spreading."

Dr. Newsome adds that even if someone leaves the virus on your keyboard or phone and goes home for the night, it should be dead by the next day. The swine flu virus survives only 24 hours on hard surface outside the body and less than one hour on a soft surface.

"This is an educated guess of course is that its 15 to 30 minutes it can survive," says Dr. Newsome. "It's a short-lived virus and it doesn't live in the environment. It lives in people."

Newsome says some respiratory viruses contain small particles that hang in the air, and then you breathe them in and get sick. However, the swine flu virus is made up of heavier particles that don't hang in the air. These are large respiratory droplets that don't remain suspended in the air, but they can land on a desk top, on a counter top.

Dr. Newsome says legally you don't have to tell your boss or coworkers if you have swine flu, but he thinks you should. "I think it's a courteous thing to let your coworkers know, 'Hey, I have flu like symptoms,' so that they can be alert to themselves and how they feel."

You can get more information about the swine flu virus at work or plans for businesses to deal with it at www.flu.gov.

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