Exploring national surveillance for health-related workplace absenteeism: lessons learned from the 2009 influenza A pandemic.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: During the 2009 influenza A (H1N1) virus pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention did a pilot study to test the feasibility of using national surveillance of workplace absenteeism to assess the pandemic’s impact on the workplace to plan for preparedness and continuity of operations and to contribute to health awareness during the emergency response.

METHODS: Population-based and sentinel worksite approaches were used. Monthly measures of the 1-week prevalence of health-related absenteeism among full-time workers were estimated using nationally representative data from the Current Population Survey. Enhanced passive surveillance of absenteeism was conducted using weekly data from a convenience sample of sentinel worksites.

RESULTS: Nationally, the pandemic’s impact on workplace absenteeism was small. Estimates of 1-week absenteeism prevalence did not exceed 3.7%. However, peak workplace absenteeism was correlated with the highest occurrence of both influenza-like illness and influenza-positive laboratory tests.

CONCLUSION: Systems for monitoring workplace absenteeism should be included in pandemic preparedness planning.

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