

## **Firms should not panic over flu pandemic**

The TUC is warning against an over-reaction from firms on the flu pandemic threat, saying some employers are panicking and taking pointless and disruptive measures. Guidance for employers and unions published last week by TUC gives advice on how workplaces could best prepare for a possible UK outbreak. It warns of the possibility that employers could fall victim to 'snake-oil' salesmen, as happened during the recent SARS outbreak, and urges employers not to panic or stockpile products that could have no impact on the spread of the virus. Instead, TUC calls on employers to develop a contingency plan for dealing with an outbreak that could disrupt transport, supplies, banking, the internet and which could see up to 50 per cent of the workforce absent at any one time. With schools likely to close for example, many working parents would be unable to come into work. The TUC wants to see employers develop plans for working from home, dealing with sickness absence, and encouraging better personal hygiene at work. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber commented: "Unions are already telling us of sales companies phoning up employers offering to supply anti-viral medication to their staff in the event of an outbreak. Others are trying to sell supplies of latex gloves or disposable facemasks on the back of the pandemic flu threat." He added: "It is important that employers don't panic, but put sensible plans in place. There is also no evidence that the use of latex gloves or disposable masks in most workplace situations would have any effect on the spread of the virus and it is likely that people might feel that if they wear such protection they can come into work even if they are ill. This could lead to an increased risk." He said if large firms hogged the stocks of anti-virals "simply to keep their staff at work during an outbreak, this could have serious implications for the treatment of people who actually get ill and really need anti-viral medication."

- [TUC news release](#) and flu pandemic guidance [[pdf](#)].