

Pandemic Influenza Preparation and Response Guidelines

"Sometimes you really don't know what you don't know. Dealing with new and emerging infections is a very humbling experience. We should not pretend to know what will happen. Will it be severe or mild? Which age groups will be most affected? We just don't know." Dr. Margaret Chan, Representative of the Director for Pandemic Influenza, World Health Organization

It is important to prepare to respond to and recover from a localized outbreak of influenza, as well as a potential broader pandemic. A pandemic will likely reduce dramatically the number of available workers in all sectors and significantly disrupt the movement of people and goods. Most businesses may have contingency plans for managing natural and man-made disasters. However, the majority of these business continuity plans do not fully account for the significant negative impacts resulting from a severe pandemic influenza. This guide will assist in expanding upon traditional notions of continuity of operations.

According to the CDC, an influenza outbreak will result in 30 percent of the overall population being infected. Illness rates will be highest among school-aged children and decline with age. Among working adults, an average of 20 percent will become ill. Rates of absenteeism will depend on the severity of the pandemic. In a severe pandemic, absenteeism attributable to illness, the need to care for ill family members and fear of infection may reach 40 percent. On average, infected persons will transmit infection to approximately two other people.

STEPS TO TAKE

You should give consideration to how you will:

- Maintain essential operations and services if 40 percent or more of all workers are out sick or choose to stay home to avoid exposure.

- Maintain essential operations and services when ill workers choose or are forced to stay home
- Maintain essential operations and services when community outbreaks last six to eight weeks and multiple waves strike in a calendar year
- Bolster the depth of reserves for essential workers at all levels
- Ensure family and childcare support for essential workers

TAKE COMMON-SENSE STEPS TO LIMIT THE SPREAD OF GERMS

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Put used tissues in a waste basket.
- Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue.
- Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Stay at home if you are sick.

PANDEMIC DISEASE CONTAINMENT/CONTROL STRATEGIES

Key disease containment strategies include:

- Isolation: Separation of persons with specific infectious illnesses in their homes, in hospitals or in designated healthcare facilities.

- Quarantine: Separation and restriction of movement, usually of a group of people, who, while not yet ill, have potentially been exposed to the infectious agent.

(Though you may not be responsible for initiating isolation and quarantine activities, you might have both a role and responsibilities to assist in their deployment and success.)

- Social Distancing: Within the workplace, social distancing measures usually take the form of modifying the frequency and type of face-to-face employee interactions such as:
 - Placing a moratorium on hand-shaking
 - Substituting teleconferences/videoconferences in place of face-to-face meetings
 - Staggering breaks
 - Establishing flexible work hours or worksite
 - Promoting social distancing between employees and customers to maintain three-foot spatial separation between individuals
 - Implementing strategies that request and enable employees with influenza to stay home at the first sign of symptoms.
- Posting infection control guidelines
- Closing Places of Assembly: Voluntary or mandatory closure of public places, including churches, schools and theaters.

- “Snow Days/Weeks” and/or Furloughing Non-Essential Workers: Voluntary or mandatory closure of all non-essential businesses and/or furloughing all non-essential workers.
- Changes in Movement Patterns: Restricting movement at/across international borders, instituting reductions in the transportation sector and complying with quarantine protocols.

It is critical to develop a practical tool to assist in your pandemic planning and response efforts. Doing so further emphasizes the importance of a shift from conventional business continuity to pandemic specific planning.

“If a pandemic hits our shores, it will affect almost every sector of our society, not just health care, but transportation systems, workplaces, schools, public safety and more. It will require coordinated government-wide response, including Federal, State and local governments and it will require the private sector and all of us as individuals to be ready.” Secretary Mike Leavitt, Department of Health and Human Services.