

**GUIDELINES FOR BUSINESS PANDEMIC READINESS**

Abstract: This document is provided to business owners and others who have responsibility for business continuity planning in their organization. This document provides general information about business planning for a pandemic, specifically an influenza pandemic. It will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.

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## SCOPE

**This is not a plan.** However, this document can be used as a guide by organizations of all types and sizes, both public and private to assist with continuity of operations planning. While this document focuses on business readiness for a pandemic emergency, many of the concepts can also be used for other types of emergencies. Be aware that state and federal laws that will affect your business may be modified, suspended or enacted in response to a pandemic. Be sure to involve your own human resource and legal counsel as necessary throughout this process.

## ASSUMPTIONS

The following assumptions are provided as additional issues to consider when beginning your business planning for a pandemic. These assumptions are specific to an influenza pandemic and not universal for all emergencies.

- Officials and experts do not know how long a pandemic could last. Communities may be affected in 6-8 week waves that may continue for up to 18 months.
- State and federal laws that will affect your business **may be** modified, suspended or enacted in response to a pandemic. Examples of this include: voluntary self-quarantine, suspension of public gatherings like football games, closure of buildings where many people gather (i.e. shopping malls), etc. Be sure to involve your own human resource and legal counsel as necessary throughout this process.
- Healthcare resources will likely be stretched beyond capacity.
- Up to 40% of your workforce may be absent at one time.
- If infected, people may be ill for approximately two weeks.
- Susceptibility to the outbreak is universal.

## SECTION 1: Employee Safety and Awareness

### *At Home*

Individual and family personal planning is the foundation of business, community and national preparedness for any kind of disaster. If individuals can raise their level of personal preparedness, first responders and other emergency management agencies will be better able to deliver services to those with the most critical needs. This is especially true during a severe pandemic, as health care resources will likely be stressed beyond capacity.

Businesses can do much to assist their employees with personal preparedness simply by providing reliable sources of information and encouraging them to take action. All citizens should make a plan and prepare an emergency kit for a wide range of disasters; planning for an influenza pandemic requires only minor modifications to these preparations.

Several reputable organizations already provide general information, educational materials, templates and recommendations for personal/family preparedness. A simple message to your employees linking them to these resources, and encouraging them to take action is an excellent first step in your business preparedness and communications plan:

- Red Cross- Home Care
- [FEMA National Situation Update](#)
- [Pandemic Flu.gov](#)

Note: website addresses can be found in Section 5, Resources.

Incorporate an ongoing plan for updating your employees on new information and developments in the progression of the pandemic. These updates can be in the form of emails, electronic or paper newsletters, staff meeting topics or telephone calling trees to notify employees of key events. Regularly remind employees of reputable news sources for information, such as:

- [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Should a pandemic advance to the United States, your business continuity plan may include ways that you can support sick employees. Your policy decisions before an outbreak will inform employees what options they have for teleworking or for time off of work to care for themselves and/or family members. You may want to consider developing a company “hot-line” to easily inform employees at alternate work locations of the business’ status.

### ***At Work***

Although similar to home preparedness, employers should consider the impact of a pandemic at the workplace and prepare to address those as unique issues.

Employers should provide employees with training and information regarding the organization’s emergency plans. Organizations should also develop a communications plan that includes a process to update employees on the status of the situation and business operations. Provide employees with good information links, such as:

- [Emergency Preparedness for Business \(NIOSH\)](#)
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\) Pandemic Planning](#)
- [FEMA National Situation Update](#)
- [Pandemic Flu.gov](#)
- [OSHA guidelines](#)

While at the workplace, employers should encourage good sanitation, hygiene and health practices including:

- Frequently wash hands with soap and water.
- Cover sneezes with a tissue or sleeve, not your hands.
- Encourage employees and their families to receive annual flu shots.
- Encourage sick employees to stay home.
- Encourage general good health practices.
- Discourage stockpiling of anti-virals.

## **SECTION 2: Business Impact Analysis (BIA)**

An initial consideration for employers is to identify the core functions and processes that must be maintained to ensure the ongoing operation of the organization. Some functions may be placed on hold in the event of a pandemic in order to sustain a base level of operations. Core functions may include:

1. Operations (i.e. IT, suppliers, staffing, distribution channels)
  - Notifying suppliers, boards, and employees of any changes to the work schedule.
  - Continuing to provide support to all ongoing projects.
  - Continuing to run information technology (IT) functions (including virtual private network (VPN)).
  - Reviewing outsourcing contracts to determine if penalties for non-performance are adequate.
2. Accounting (i.e., accounts receivable, accounts payable, finance systems)
  - Making arrangements to pay employees (many use direct deposit, but if vendor is unable to process, actual cash may be required).
  - Continuing to pay expenses in timely fashion.

3. Sales
  - Determining creative ways to support sales staff that work on commission.
4. Customer Service
  - Informing and reassuring customers that you are still in business and if any normal business functions have been suspended.

Once your core functions have been identified, you will need to determine your base staffing needs for minimal support of critical operations. Be sure to focus on key functions rather than the individuals who currently perform these tasks.

1. Identify required skill sets and determine what cross training should take place.
2. Identify how markets will change during a pandemic and how they will affect staffing requirements.
3. If you outsource, ensure that your outsourcing vendors have pandemic influenza plans in place. If they do not, look at internal resources to accomplish those functions at a minimal level.
4. Executive office should provide leadership by example and represent the company to stakeholders and the general public.

### **SECTION 3: Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP)**

Now that you have identified your critical functions and key staffing requirements, you should develop a plan with specific processes for maintaining critical operations. Your plan should consider the effects of an influenza pandemic such as:

- Up to 40% of your workforce may be absent at one time.
- If infected, people may be ill for approximately two weeks.
- Susceptibility is universal.
- Communities may be affected in 6-8 week waves that may continue for up to 18 months.

Your local public health agency can assist you in your planning efforts. For a list of additional resources, please see **Section 5**.

1. Develop a Contingency Planning Team.
  - For example, designate a member from each area/discipline and arrange scheduled meetings (via telephone or other mechanism). Consider developing a special web page and/or voice message that can be set up and “turned on” if needed for updates (accessible by all employees).
2. Identify chain of command and ensure that positions of authority have identified back-ups with the ability to execute decisions.
3. Identify key customers and suppliers.
  - Implement strategies to reduce reliance on “just-in-time” inventories.
  - Stock adequate supplies and parts for crucial equipment.
  - Identify several alternative sources for critical domestic and imported materials and supplies.
4. Protect key assets (including intellectual property).
5. Identify and/or increase credit lines.
6. Keep COOP updated, monthly.

7. Implement alternative work arrangements.
  - Shift work to different locations as needed.
  - Relax the shift structure to accommodate those that are able to work.
  - Create and/or expand telework opportunities.
    - Increase remote employee broadband dial-in access capabilities.
    - Require teleconferencing/video conferencing/virtual learning.
    - Expand on-line transaction and self-service options for customers and partners.
    - Review security measures for remote teleworking through computers, cell phones and personal digital assistants (PDA).
  - Consider temporary shutdown (“hibernation”).
8. Consider surge capacity needs (personnel pool - retirees, personnel sharing with other companies, etc).
9. Develop a communication plan.
  - Include a variety of systems (Internet, telephone, mobile voice & data, Virtual Private Network (VPN), firewalls, E-mail, web services).
  - Develop protocols, methodology and schedule for regular updates.
    - Employees - Internal daily updates on company status.
    - Customers - External daily updates on company status/capabilities.

#### **SECTION 4: Human Resources**

Unlike the disasters that most organizations plan for, a pandemic will not primarily affect equipment and facilities, but rather the people organizations depend on to produce products and services. Additionally, the current assumptions about a pandemic’s duration push the boundaries of most existing absence-from-work policies. Therefore, organizations must thoroughly examine their human resource management practices and policies, refining and/or implementing policies that address the long timeline of a pandemic event.

In planning for a pandemic, organizations may want to consider defining and publishing guidelines/policies including:

- Paid Time Off, Sick Leave, and Vacation.
  - Consider retaining existing procedures but extending timelines to address longer absences as may be required.
  - Establish triggers to activate modified procedures.
  - Devise and approve plans to accommodate leaves of absence and extended sick leave.
  - Encourage or enforce sick employees to not report to work.
- Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). A federal law that requires employers (those with 50 or more employees at a work site) to grant eligible employees up to 12 workweeks of unpaid leave for certain medical or family reasons. Check with your human resource and legal counsel to ensure your compliance.
  - Ensure that supervisors know when to recognize possible FMLA triggers (i.e., out 3 calendar days).
  - Though not mandated by FMLA, consider providing a paid portion of the maximum 3 month period, perhaps 4 – 8 weeks.
  - Review state laws on additional FMLA requirements if applicable.
- Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (COBRA)
  - Review COBRA and Continuation of Group Health Coverage requirements.
- Workers’ Compensation
  - Consult with your Workers’ Compensation provider for guidance related to pandemic issues.
- Essential versus non-essential workers.
  - Consider how you will designate personnel to support critical functions.
  - Every employee is important to your business, but some employees, who support your most critical functions, are considered essential. Define what “essential” and “non-essential” workers are and if there are any additional considerations for each

- category in your policies.
      - Each job function could include an essential or non-essential designation.
    - Convey to employees that their duties, functions and roles may change throughout the pandemic.
    - People may move between “essential” and ‘non-essential” depending on the nature of the event.
  - Failure to report for work.
    - Consider how you will address issues related to employees who refuse to come to work due to fear of imminent harm or the threat of becoming ill.
  - Temporary shut-down (“hibernation”).
    - Layoff or extended leave policy.
    - Re-employment policy.
  - Compensation.
    - Encourage direct payroll deposits for all employees.
    - Be prepared to handle large volume of insurance claims, both health and death beneficiary.
    - Be aware of possible changes to employment taxes.
    - Review disability and death benefits coverage and payment levels. Ensure solvency of your carrier to pay benefits.
    - Review existing severance pay guidelines.
  - Communication.
    - Develop a method for telling employees, customers, contractors and suppliers that they may have been exposed to an illness.
    - Suggest that the employee contact their healthcare provider, but do not give details about source (person) of exposure – confidentiality is key. Follow your human resources emergency plan recommendations.
    - Update employees about organization’s preparedness plans.
    - Develop procedures and provide training/guidance for management/supervisor response should an employee become ill.
    - Develop guidelines for sending employees home in the event of apparent illness.
    - Keep building management informed of your company’s situation.

All of these issues should be considered and documented as appropriate in your organization’s emergency human resources plan. These policies should be communicated to your employees often so that they understand the kind of resources available to them, and what actions the organization will take during a pandemic.

In addition, ensure that all employee insurance forms and beneficiaries are accurate and up-to-date before a pandemic hits.

## **SECTION 5: Resources**

**Association of Contingency Planners (ACP)** - is a non-profit trade association dedicated to fostering continued professional growth and development in effective Contingency & Business Resumption Planning. <http://www.acp-international.com/>

### **Specific items of interest from ACP:**

Pandemic/Avian Flu Planning Information and Tools – a collection of websites, white papers and other resources to help businesses plan for a pandemic. <http://www.acp-international.com/pandemic.html>

**Business Continuity Institute (BCI)** – A professional organization whose mission is to promote the art and science of business continuity management. <http://www.thebci.org/>

**Contingency Planning and Management (CPM)** – Magazine and article archives on business continuity planning topics. Free registration required for access, includes free subscription to their magazine. <http://www.contingencyplanning.com/>

**Specific items of interest from CPM:**

BCP Handbook – articles on contingency planning, continuity of information and exercising your contingency planning teams. <http://www.contingencyplanning.com/tools/bcphandbook/>

**Continuity Central** – Online resource for business continuity news, jobs and information. <http://www.continuitycentral.com/index.htm>

**Continuity Insights** - Business continuity industry magazine. Free registration, includes free subscription to their magazine. <http://continuityinsights.com/>

**Disaster Recovery Institute International (DRII)** – Non-profit organization whose goal is to and professionalism of certified individuals. <http://www.drii.org>

**Disaster Recovery Journal** - Business continuity industry magazine. Free registration, includes free subscription to their magazine. <http://www.drj.com/>

**Specific items of interest from DRI:**

DRJ Toolbox – Sample documents and other resources for business continuity planners. <http://www.drj.com/new2dr/toolchest/drjtools.htm>

Business Continuity Planning Model – Explanation of the DRII business continuity planning steps. <http://www.drj.com/new2dr/model/bcmodel.htm>

DRJ Sample Plans, Outlines and Other Plan Writing Resources. <http://www.drj.com/new2dr/samples.htm>

**Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** – Emergency management information in nearly 30 categories, including businesses; directory of contacts, disaster reports, education and links. <http://www.fema.gov/>

**Specific items of interest at FEMA:**

Online, independent study course on designing and conducting a disaster recovery exercise. [IS- 139:Exercise Design](http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is139.asp)  
<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/is139.asp>

Information collected from a variety of resources for use in emergency planning and response.

[FEMA National Situation Update](http://www.fema.gov/emergency/reports/index.shtm)  
<http://www.fema.gov/emergency/reports/index.shtm>

**Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS)** – Non-profit association whose mission is to reduce the social and economic effects of natural disasters and other property losses by conducting research and advocating improved construction, maintenance and preparation practices. <http://www.ibhs.org/>

**Specific items of interest from IBHS:**

Open for Business – Disaster planning toolkit for small to medium sized businesses. [http://www.ibhs.org/business\\_protection/](http://www.ibhs.org/business_protection/)

**National Environmental Health Association (NEHA)** – A non-profit professional association whose mission is to advance the environmental health and protection profession for the purpose of providing a healthful environment for all. <http://www.neha.org/>

**National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)** - Federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related injury and illness. <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html>

**Specific items of interest from NIOSH:**

Emergency Preparedness for Business – a collection of planning guides to help businesses prepared for emergencies.

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/prepared/>

**Pandemic Flu.gov** – One stop access to U.S. government avian and pandemic flu information. <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>

**Specific items of interest from pandemicflu.gov:**

National Strategy – U.S. Government plan and strategy overview.

[http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab\\_1.html#national](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab_1.html#national)

**U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA)** – Federal agency responsible for ensuring workplace safety.

<http://www.osha.gov>

**U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)** – A federal agency providing information, services and other resources to small businesses.

<http://www.sba.gov/>

**World Health Organization (WHO)** - United Nations specialized agency for health whose objective is to promote complete physical, mental and social well-being by all people.

<http://www.who.int/en/>

**Specific items of interest from WHO:**

Avian Influenza – background information, latest news, maps and situational archives.

[http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian\\_influenza/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/index.html)

Pandemic Preparedness – information and documents on preparedness, including background information, guidelines, plans and checklists.