

PANDEMIC INFLUENZA BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

Pandemic Characteristics and Impact

A pandemic will not be like a physical disaster. A pandemic has unique characteristics when compared to typical disasters.

WIDESPREAD ILLNESS: The impact of a pandemic would likely be widespread, possibly even world-wide. There may be very little outside assistance. Many business continuity plans (BCPs) assume part of the organization is unaffected and can take up the remainder of the workload.

NOT A PHYSICAL DISASTER: A pandemic is not a physical disaster. It has unique characteristics that could require implementation of activities to limit contact, such as restriction of movement, isolation, quarantine, and closure of public gatherings.

DURATION: A pandemic would not be a short event followed immediately by recovery. Many BCPs assume the event will be short-lived and that recovery can begin immediately.

NOTICE: It is unlikely that there will be some advanced warning from the development of the pandemic overseas or in another part of the country, but it is possible for the warning period to be short. If pandemic influenza spreads within the United States it could be weeks before the full impact on the workforce is felt, although there may be some early impacts related to school closings or similar containment measures.

PRIMARY EFFECT IS ON STAFFING LEVELS: Unlike natural disasters, where any disruption to business operation in the event of a pandemic is anticipated to be mainly human-resource oriented. Businesses should plan for up to 50% staff absences for periods of about two weeks at the height of a severe pandemic wave, and lower levels of staff absences for a few weeks on either side of the peak. Overall a pandemic wave may last about 8 weeks. There will likely be additional waves of illness of varying severity over time.

Staff absences can be expected for many reasons:

- Illness/incapacity (suspected/actual/post-infections)
- Illness of a family member
- People may feel safer at home
- Some people may be fulfilling other voluntary roles in the community
- Others may need to stay home to look after school-aged children or adults normally cared for during normal work hours (if schools or adult care facilities are closed.)

A pandemic may have other impacts on businesses, for example:

- Supplies of materials needed for ongoing activities may be disrupted

- Availability of services from sub-contractors may be impacted (such as maintenance of key equipment)
- Demand for services may be impacted-demand for some services may increase; while demand for others may fall.

Business Continuity Planning for a Pandemic

Short to Long-Term Planning

It is not possible to predict how long a pandemic will last. There could be more than one wave of infection during a pandemic period. Each wave could typically last about eight weeks. Businesses should plan for up to 50% staff absences for periods of about two weeks at the height of a pandemic wave and lower levels of staff absences for the few weeks on either side of the peak.

To ensure business continuity in a pandemic, short-term planning, with a health focus is necessary. Succession planning (in the event of staff deaths or long-term disability during the pandemic) and back up planning is also essential. Emergency management and overall national recovery is greatly facilitated if essential services are available without significant interruption.

Continuity planning for a pandemic should include:

- Identification of essential business activities (and the core people and skills to keep them running), and ensuring that these are backed-up with alternative arrangements;
- Mitigation of business/economic disruptions, including possible shortages of supplies; and
- Minimizing illness in workers and customers.

Influenza Manager

When planning for a pandemic, it is a good idea to identify one or more people in your organization who will be responsible for workplace health and safety. Some of the tasks the “Influenza Manager” may perform include:

- Setting up a system to monitor staff who are ill or suspected to be ill in the event of a pandemic, including contacting staff who are unexpectedly absent from work-has their physician been notified of their illness? Have “contact” issues been addressed? Is someone able to care for them?
- Setting up a process to facilitate/encourage the return of staff to work once they are better or at the end of a quarantine period; and
- Ensuring that your workplace has adequate supplies of tissues, medical and hand hygiene products, cleaning supplies and masks for people who become ill at work. It may be difficult to purchase these products once a pandemic begins.

Below is a table that provides summary guidance as to how a business might proceed as different stages of a pandemic are reached.

Stage	Strategy	Alert Code	Suggested Actions for Businesses
1	Plan for it (Planning)	White (information/advisory)	Review business continuity plans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify essential services (including contractors), facilities/plants, other production inputs Plan for up to 50% staff absences for periods of 2-3 weeks at the height of the pandemic, and lower levels of staff absences for a few weeks on either side of the pandemic Assess core staff and skill requirement needs and ensure essential positions are backed-up by an alternative staff member Identify ways to increase “social distancing” in the workplace, reduce movement, etc. Consider organizational policies to encourage the sick to stay at home and enable staff to work from home Identify ways to minimize illness among staff and customers, and consider how essential messages (e.g. handwashing) can be communicated with staff Identify needs for personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning equipment, check air conditioning. Purchase additional contingency supplies.
		Yellow (Standby)	
2	Keep it out (Border Management)	Red (Activation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alert staff to change in pandemic status Activate staff overseas restrictions Review/test essential business continuity measures
3	Stamp it out (Cluster control)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alert staff to change in the pandemic status Activate essential business continuity measures Activate measures to minimize introduction and/or spread of infection in work place (post notices, social distancing, managing ill staff members, workplace cleaning, etc.) Communicate with staff to promote confidence in the workplace Activate contact tracing where staff become ill at work during Cluster Control phase Activate process for recovered/well staff members to return to work
4	Manage it (Pandemic Management)		
5	Recover from it (Recovery)	Green (Stand down)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage return to business as normal

Communication with Staff

It is likely there will be anxiety regarding a pandemic, which will contribute to increased work absences and/or increased distress to staff. The suggested ways to manage this include:

- Communicate the possibility of a pandemic—and your organization’s preparedness to manage it—very early to staff. The Denton County Health Department has fact sheets available to assist with your employee education initiatives.
- Discuss with staff possible health and safety issues, potential for stand down, and leave arrangements if they are ill or need to look after those who are or who have been “shut out” of childcare, schools, adult day care, etc.

- Have a comprehensive management plan in place which is clearly communicated to the staff. Ensure that communications management during the pandemic is part of the plan. It will be important to have systems in place to allow your agency to communicate in a pandemic
- In activating your plan, provide clear, timely and proactive communication to staff, including how your organization is handling the situation
- You may wish to establish a “communications or call down tree” so that people can keep in touch.

Essential Business Activities

In the event of a pandemic, it is important that core people and core skills are available to keep essential parts of your business operating.

Identification of Core People and Core Skills

Issues you may want to consider include:

- What are the “essential” parts of the business?
- Who are the core people required to keep the essential parts of the business running?
- What are the core skills required to keep business running?
- Are there sufficient back ups for people and skills if there is a high level of absence? Are there other resources (e.g. volunteers, retirees) that could be drawn on if necessary? Is it possible to operate your business remotely using telephone or email?
- Who are the core people required to manage the pandemic contingency plan?
- Do you have any systems which rely on periodic physical intervention by key individuals, to keep them going? How long would the system last without attention?

Once the core people and skills are identified, ensure that they are aware of their position and how they will be managed in the event of a pandemic. Consider strategies for minimizing the possibility that they will get sick, such as working from home even in the very early stages of a pandemic or other social distancing measures.

If working from home is not a well-established practice in your organization, you may wish to encourage staff to practice doing so on a regular basis, to aid familiarity and to verify that it would be operationally possible.

You may wish to have non-essential staff stay away from work to help exposure rates, but appropriate pay arrangement would need to be established prior to an event.

Business Planning for Absence

Issues you may wish to consider include:

- What are critical staff numbers and skills required to keep essential business running and at what level does business stop? What arrangements need to be made to minimize risk to staff?
- Who should make the decision to shut activity down when absence rates threaten safe business continuity?
- Could some, or all, of your business operations shift to having most staff work from home with little warning?

An influenza pandemic may affect regions of the United States and the world differently in terms of timing, severity, and duration. Some regions may be hit earlier, longer, or harder. Businesses with regional offices may need to consider rotating service delivery from hard hit areas to influenza-free areas, or areas that have been declared to be in a post-pandemic period. Restrictions on movement of people from region to region may be imposed, and rotation of staff may therefore be difficult.

Businesses with overseas offices, or which use services outsourced from overseas (e.g. call centers), may be disproportionately affected. Not all countries have the means to cope with a pandemic. Employees and staff contracted outside of the United States may have increased rates of illness and absence.

Knowledge Management

Key operating and emergency management information will need to be stored in a known, accessible and shared location.

Communications

Consider communication needs and how they might be maintained with:

- Other departments in your organization
- Government
- Key suppliers
- Key customers
- Key contractors

Shortage of Supplies

Supply shortages may occur because of increased demand during the pandemic (i.e. cleaning supplies). Pandemic planning should consider the need for ensuring adequate availability of essential supplies.

Shortages may also occur because disruptions in transportation systems or suppliers' inability to meet demand because of their own staff shortages. Some United States supplies travel considerable distances by truck, train, ship, or airplane, and are vulnerable to any disruption. Absences of workers/drivers and other transportation staff may affect both the production and delivery of needed supplies. Supply lines may also be affected by mandated or self-imposed travel restrictions. Discuss with key suppliers a plan for regular shipments

in the event of shortages or disruptions in transportation systems. International air movement may be disrupted in a pandemic, and this may impact imported goods, if they are normally transported by airplane.

Staff and Visitor Protection

After identifying the core people and skills to keep the essential parts of your business operating, your pandemic plan should consider how to minimize illness among staff and visitors. The major strategies include:

- Restrict workplace entry of people with influenza symptoms
- Practice good personal hygiene and workplace cleaning habits
- Increase social distancing (e.g. working from home, avoid face to face meetings)
- Manage staff who become ill at work
- Manage staff who travel

This section identifies some issues you may want to take into consideration in your plan as well as offering guidance on how to address them.

Protection Measures	Where Applicable
Hand washing, cough etiquette, ventilation	Everyone, all the time
Organizational policies	Every organization, all the time
Social distancing	Everyone, when necessary and practical
Protective barriers	In situations where regular work practice requires unavoidable, relatively close contact with the public
Disposable surgical masks	Workers in any community or health care setting who are caring for the sick, including first responders. Use in addition to protective barriers
Disposable particulate respirator masks, eye protection, gloves, gowns/aprons	Health care workers participating in direct patient care where there is a high risk of contact with respiratory secretions, particularly via aerosols.

Restrict Workplace Entry of People with Influenza Symptoms

On declaration of Code Red, your business should consider putting up notices at all workplace/facility entry points, advising staff and visitors not to enter if they have influenza symptoms.

Employees should be advised not to come to work when they are not feeling well, particularly if they are experiencing influenza-type symptoms. It may be helpful to inform staff of the difference in symptoms between influenza and the common cold. Unwell

employees should be advised to contact their health care provider. Employees who are ill should stay home until their symptoms are resolved.

Use normal communication methods to ensure that all staff receives the notice. At the same time, you may wish to provide them with further information about how to stay well during an influenza pandemic, e.g. handwashing and infection control information (Denton County Health Department has information available).

In your pandemic planning, set up a process for ensuring that ill employees have completed any required isolation period and are healthy before allowing them to return to work.

Note that staff who have recovered from the pandemic influenza are unlikely to be re-infected due to natural immunity and should be encouraged to return to work as soon as they are well.

Personal Hygiene

Basic personal hygiene measures should be reinforced and people should be encouraged to practice them to minimize potential influenza transmission.

- Cover nose and mouth when sneezing and coughing (preferably with a disposable single use tissue)
- Immediately dispose of used tissues
- Adopt good handwashing practices, particularly after coughing, sneezing, or using tissues
- Keep hands away from the mucous membranes of the eyes, mouth, and nose.

Ensure that adequate supplies for handwashing are available. This is a high planning priority as there may be interruption to the supply or shortage of soap and hand towels.

Communicate hand and personal hygiene information to staff and visitors

- Hygiene notices should be posted in all workplace entrances, bathrooms, hand washing stations and public areas
- Use brochures, newsletters, global emails, employee notice boards, and information included with paychecks, to inform your employees of the importance of hand washing and environmental cleaning during a pandemic.

Workplace Cleaning

During a pandemic, you will need to implement additional measures to minimize the transmission of the virus through environmental sources, particularly hard surfaces (e.g. sinks, handles, railings, counters). Transmission from contaminated hard surfaces is unlikely but the influenza virus may live up to two days on hard surfaces.

Influenza viruses are inactivated by alcohol and chlorine. Cleaning of environmental surfaces with a neutral detergent followed by a disinfectant solution is recommended. Surfaces that are frequently touched with hands should be cleaned often, preferably daily.

Staff should be reminded not to share cups, dishes, and utensils and ensure they thoroughly wash items with soap and hot water after use.

Remove all magazines/papers from the waiting rooms and common areas (kitchens, breakrooms)

When a person with suspected influenza is identified and has left work, it is important that their work area, along with other known places they have been, are cleaned and disinfected.

Among other things, planning should identify the basic hygiene practices (including hand washing) to be followed by cleaning staff, protocol for personal protective equipment (if necessary) and methods for waste disposal.

Increase Social Distancing

Another strategy to protect staff is minimizing their contact with others. Crowded places and large gatherings of people should be avoided, whether in internal or external spaces.

A distance of at least one four feet should be maintained between persons wherever practical. Larger distances are more effective.

Visiting of, or other contact with, sick people should be avoided whenever possible.

Suggestions on how to minimize contact include:

- Avoid meeting people face to face-use telephone, video conferencing, and internet to conduct business as much as possible-even with participants are in the same building.
- Avoid any unnecessary travel and cancel or postpone non-essential meetings/gatherings/workshops/training sessions.
- If possible, arrange for employees to work from home or work variable hours to avoid crowding at the workplace.
- Practice “ghost” shift changes, whenever possible, with the shift going off duty leaving the workplace before the new shift enters. If possible, leave an interval before re-occupation of the workplace. If possible, thoroughly ventilate the workplace between shifts by opening doors and windows or turning up the air conditioning.
- Avoid public transport: walk, ride a bike, drive a care or go early or late to avoid rush hour crowding on public transportation.
- Bring lunch and eat at desk or away from others. Introduce staggered lunchtimes so the numbers of people in the lunch room are reduced.

- Do not congregate in breakrooms or other areas where people socialize. Do what needs to be done and then leave the area.
- If a face-to-face meeting with people is necessary, minimize the meeting time, choose a large meeting room and sit at least four feet from each other, if possible. Avoid shaking hands or hugging. Consider holding meetings in the open air.
- Set up systems where clients can pre-order, request information via phone, email, fax and have order or information ready for fast pickup or delivery.
- Encourage staff to avoid recreational or other leisure classes or meetings where they might come into contact with infectious people.

Managing Staff Who Become Ill at Work

Your pandemic plan should indicate how your business will manage staff that becomes ill at work. One possible process is outlined below, but you will want to modify it to suit your business situation. If a person feels ill, or if someone observes that another person is exhibiting symptoms of influenza at work, they are to contact the “Influenza Manager” by telephone if at all possible.

The Influenza Manager:

1. Should avoid visiting the person if it can be avoided-manage the process over the phone.
2. Check if the employee has any of the symptoms that could indicate influenza.
3. If the employee does not have any symptoms, they should be educated on infection control practices, such as hand washing, but advised to call the Influenza Manager again later or see their health care provider if they still have concerns.
4. If the employee does have influenza symptoms, they should be told to contact their health care provider and sent home.
5. The employee should be informed where they can find a surgical mask and instructed to wear it immediately. This will help to protect other staff.
6. The employee should avoid, if at all possible, public transportation when leaving work.
7. The employee’s work station should be cleaned and disinfected.

Helpful Websites

Pandemic Influenza Official Website, www.pandemicflu.gov

World Health Organization, www.who.int

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov

Material Adapted from New Zealand’s Influenza Pandemic Planning: Business Continuity Planning Guide.