Planning for a Flu Pandemic in the Workplace

In the event of an influenza pandemic, employers will play a key role in protecting employees’ health and safety as well as limiting the impact on the economy and society. Proper planning will allow employers to better protect their employees and lessen the impact of a pandemic on society and the economy.

Severe Pandemic Influenza and the Workplace

Unlike natural disasters or terrorist events, an influenza pandemic would be widespread, affecting multiple areas of the United States and other countries at the same time. A pandemic would also be an extended event, with multiple waves of outbreaks in the same geographic area; each outbreak could last from six to eight weeks. Your workplace would likely experience:

- **Absenteeism** - A pandemic could affect as many as 40 percent of the workforce during periods of peak influenza illness. Employees could be absent because they are sick, must care for sick family members or children if schools or day care centers are closed or are afraid to come to work.
- **Change in patterns of commerce** - During a pandemic, consumer demand for items related to infection control is likely to increase dramatically, while consumer interest in other goods may decline. Consumers may also change the ways in which they shop as a result of the pandemic. Consumers may try to shop at off-peak hours to reduce contact with other people, show increased interest in home delivery services, or prefer other options, such as drive-through service, to reduce person-to-person contact.
- **Interrupted supply/delivery** - Shipments of items from geographic areas severely affected by the pandemic may be delayed or cancelled.

Influenza is thought to be primarily spread when infected people cough, sneeze or talk, sending infectious droplets into the air and into contact with other people nearby. To a lesser degree, human influenza is spread by touching objects contaminated with influenza viruses and then transferring the infected material from the hands to the nose, mouth or eyes.

Maintaining Operations During a Pandemic

As an employer, you have an important role in protecting employee health and safety, and limiting the impact of an influenza pandemic.

**Develop a Disaster Plan**

- Be aware of and review federal, state and local health department pandemic influenza plans. Incorporate appropriate actions from these plans into workplace disaster plans.
- Prepare and plan for operations with a reduced workforce.
- Work with your suppliers to ensure that you can continue to operate and provide services.
- Develop a sick leave policy that does not penalize sick employees, thereby encouraging employees who have influenza-related symptoms to stay home so that they do not infect other employees. Recognize that employees with ill family members may also need to stay home to care for them.
Protect Employees and Customers
Educate and train employees in proper hand hygiene, cough etiquette, other flu prevention strategies and social distancing techniques. Encourage all employees to get a seasonal flu vaccine in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations. Understand and develop work practice and engineering controls that could provide additional protection to your employees and customers, such as: drive-through service windows, clear plastic sneeze barriers, ventilation, and the proper selection, use and disposal of personal protective equipment.

Avoiding the Spread of Influenza in the Workplace
The best strategy to reduce the risk of becoming infected with influenza during a pandemic is to avoid crowded settings and other situations that increase the risk of exposure to someone who may be infected. If it is absolutely necessary to be in a crowded setting, the time spent in a crowd should be as short as possible. Some basic hygiene and social distancing precautions that can be implemented in every workplace include the following:

- Encourage sick employees to stay at home.
- Encourage your employees to wash their hands frequently with soap and water or with hand sanitizer if there is no soap or water available. Also, encourage your employees to avoid touching their noses, mouths, and eyes.
- Encourage your employees to cover their coughs and sneezes with a tissue, or to cough and sneeze into their upper sleeves if tissues are not available.
- Employees should avoid close contact with their coworkers and customers (maintain a separation of at least 6 feet). They should avoid shaking hands and always wash their hands after contact with others.
- Provide customers and the public with tissues and trash receptacles, and with a place to wash or disinfect their hands.
- Keep work surfaces, telephones, computer equipment and other frequently-touched surfaces and office equipment clean.
- Discourage your employees from using other employees’ phones, desks, offices or other work tools and equipment.
- Minimize situations where groups of people are crowded together, such as in a meeting. Use e-mail, phones and text messages to communicate with each other. When meetings are necessary, avoid close contact by keeping a separation of at least 6 feet, where possible, and assure that there is proper ventilation in the meeting room.
- Promote healthy lifestyles, including good nutrition, exercise and smoking cessation. A person’s overall health impacts their body’s immune system and can affect their ability to fight off, or recover from, an infectious disease.

For More Information
Federal, state and local government agencies are your best source of information should an influenza pandemic occur. It is important to stay informed about the latest developments and recommendations since specific guidance may change based upon the characteristics of the eventual pandemic influenza strain. Below are several recommended websites that you can rely on for the most current and accurate information:

www.pandemicflu.gov
www.osha.gov
www.cdc.gov/niosh
www.cdc.gov
www.fda.gov/cdrh/ppe/fluoutbreaks.html
BUSINESS PANDEMIC INFLUENZA PLANNING CHECKLIST

In the event of pandemic influenza, businesses will play a key role in protecting employees’ health and safety as well as limiting the negative impact to the economy and society. Planning for pandemic influenza is critical. To assist you in your efforts, the Department of Health & Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have developed the following checklist for large businesses. It identifies specific activities large businesses can do now to prepare, many of which will also help you in other emergencies.

1.1 Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your business:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Done</th>
<th>In Progress</th>
<th>Not Started</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Identify a pandemic coordinator and/or team with defined roles and responsibilities for preparedness and response planning. The planning process should include input from labor representatives.

- Identify essential employees and other critical inputs (e.g. raw materials, suppliers, subcontractor services/products and logistics) required to maintain business operations by location and function during a pandemic.

- Train and prepare ancillary workforce (e.g. contractors, employees in other job titles, retirees).

- Develop and plan for scenarios likely to result in an increase or decrease in demand for your products and/or services during a pandemic (e.g. effect of restriction on mass gatherings, need for hygiene supplies).

- Determine potential impact of a pandemic on company business financials using multiple possible scenarios that affect different product lines and/or production sites.

- Determine potential impact of a pandemic on business-related domestic and international travel (e.g. quarantines, border closures).

- Find up-to-date, reliable pandemic information from community public health, emergency management, and other sources and make sustainable links.

- Establish an emergency communications plan and revise periodically. This plan includes identification of key contacts (with back-ups), chain of communications (including suppliers and customers), and processes for tracking and communicating business and employee status.

- Implement an exercise/drill to test your plan, and revise periodically.

1.2 Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your employees and customers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Done</th>
<th>In Progress</th>
<th>Not Started</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Forecast and allow for employee absences during a pandemic due to factors such as personal illness, family member illness, community containment measures and quarantines, school and/or business closures, and public transportation closures.

- Implement guidelines to modify the frequency and type of face-to-face contact (e.g. hand-shaking, seating in meetings, office layout, shared workstations) among employees and between employees and customers (refer to CDC recommendations).

- Encourage and track annual influenza vaccination for employees.

- Evaluate employee access to and availability of health care services during a pandemic, and improve services as needed.
1.3 Establish policies to be implemented during a pandemic:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Done</th>
<th>In Progress</th>
<th>Not Started</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Establish policies for employee compensation and sick-leave absences unique to a pandemic (e.g. non-punitive, liberal leave), including policies on when a previously ill person is no longer infectious and can return to work after illness.
- Establish policies for flexible worksite (e.g. telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g. staggered shifts).
- Establish policies for preventing influenza spread at the worksite (e.g. promoting respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette, and prompt exclusion of people with influenza symptoms).
- Establish policies for employees who have been exposed to pandemic influenza, are suspected to be ill, or become ill at the worksite (e.g. infection control response, immediate mandatory sick leave).
- Establish policies for restricting travel to affected geographic areas (consider both domestic and international sites), evacuating employees working in or near an affected area when an outbreak begins, and guidance for employees returning from affected areas (refer to CDC travel recommendations).
- Set up authorities, triggers and procedures for activating and terminating the company’s response plan, altering business operations (e.g. shutting down operations in affected areas), and transferring business knowledge to key employees.

1.4 Allocate resources to protect your employees and customers during a pandemic:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Done</th>
<th>In Progress</th>
<th>Not Started</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Provide sufficient and accessible infection control supplies (e.g. hand-hygiene products, tissues and receptacles for their disposal) in all business locations.
- Enhance communications and information technology infrastructures as needed to support employee telecommuting and remote customer access.
- Ensure availability of medical consultation and advice for emergency response.

1.5 Communicate to and educate your employees:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Done</th>
<th>In Progress</th>
<th>Not Started</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Develop and disseminate programs and materials covering pandemic fundamentals (e.g. signs and symptoms of influenza, modes of transmission), personal and family protection and response strategies (e.g. hand hygiene, coughing/sneezing etiquette, contingency plans).
- Anticipate employee fear and anxiety, rumors and misinformation, and plan communications accordingly.
- Ensure that communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Disseminate information to employees about your pandemic preparedness and response plan.
- Provide information for the at-home care of ill employees and family members.
- Develop platforms (e.g. hotlines, dedicated websites) for communicating pandemic status and actions to employees, vendors, suppliers and customers inside and outside the worksite in a consistent and timely way, including redundancies in the emergency contact system.
Identify community sources for timely and accurate pandemic information (domestic and international) and resources for obtaining counter-measures (e.g. vaccines and antivirals).

### 1.6 Coordinate with external organizations and help your community:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Done</th>
<th>In Progress</th>
<th>Not Started</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Collaborate with insurers, health plans and major local health care facilities to share your pandemic plans and understand their capabilities and plans.
- Collaborate with federal, state and local public health agencies and/or emergency responders to participate in their planning processes, share your pandemic plans, and understand their capabilities and plans.
- Communicate with local and/or state public health agencies and/or emergency responders about the assets and/or services your business could contribute to the community.
- Share best practices with other businesses in your communities, chambers of commerce and associations to improve community response efforts.