

## Pandemic Planning

Pandemic influenza, or flu, is a global outbreak of disease that occurs when a new influenza virus appears in humans, causes serious illness and then spreads easily from person to person. Influenza viruses periodically cause worldwide epidemics, or pandemics, with high rates of illness and death. A pandemic can occur at any time, with the potential to cause serious illness, death and colossal social and economic disruption throughout the world. Experts agree that future influenza pandemics are inevitable, but the timing of the next pandemic cannot be predicted. Since there may be little warning, continuity planning in advance is required to contain the potentially devastating effects of a pandemic.

A pandemic is not like a physical disaster. A pandemic has unique characteristics when compared with a more “typical” disaster.

**\*Widespread impact:** The impact of a pandemic would be widespread, even global in extent, not localized to a single area. Therefore there may be a little outside assistance. Many business continuity plans (BCPs) assume some part of an organization is unaffected and can take up the required capacity. That is not likely to be possible in the event of a pandemic

**\* Not a physical disaster:** A pandemic is not a physical disaster. It has some unique characteristics that require measures to limit social contact such as restriction of movement, quarantine, and closure of public gatherings.

**\*Duration:** A pandemic would not be a short, sharp event leading immediately to commencement of a recovery phase. Many BCPs assume the event is short/sharp and that recovery can start immediately.

**\*Notice:** Based on the last two pandemics, it is estimated that the next pandemic virus will be present in Canada within three months after it emerges in another part of the world, but it is, in fact, likely to occur much sooner due to increases in the volume and speed of global air travel. The first peak of illness in Canada is likely to occur within two to four months after the virus arrives in Canada. The first peak in mortality is expected one month after the peak in illness. When

pandemic influenza appears in Canada it will probably be some weeks before the full impact on the workforce will be felt, although there may be some early impacts resulting from closures of schools and similar containment measures.

**\*Primary effect is on staffing levels:** Unlike natural disasters, where any disruption to business service activity is likely to be hardware related, disruption to business operations in the event of a pandemic is anticipated to be mainly human resource oriented. Business should plan for up to 50 percent staff absences for periods of about two weeks at the height of a severe pandemic wave, and lower levels of staff absence for a few weeks either side of the peak. Overall a pandemic wave may last about eight weeks. In addition, it has been observed that an influenza pandemic usually spreads in two or more waves, either in the same year or in successive influenza seasons. A second wave may occur within three to nine months of the initial outbreak wave and may cause more serious illness and deaths than the first. In any locality, the length of each wave of illness is likely to be six to eight weeks.

### **Staff absences can be expected for many reasons:**

- \*illness/incapacity (suspected/actual/post infectious);
- \*Some employees may need to stay at home to care for the ill;
- \*People may feel safer at home (e.g. to keep out of crowded places such as public transport);
- \*Some people may be fulfilling other voluntary roles;
- \*Others may need to stay at home to look after school aged children (as schools are likely to be closed)

Information courtesy of Canadian Manufacturers and exporters.

### **Resources**

There are many government resources on the internet to help you prepare for a pandemic, including the checklist from the Government of Alberta which is presented on the next page.

[http://municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/ema/pdf/Business\\_pandemic\\_checklist\\_final.pdf](http://municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/ema/pdf/Business_pandemic_checklist_final.pdf)

Canadian Manufacturers and exporters pandemic guide at:

[www.cme-mec.ca/pdf/CME\\_pandemic\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.cme-mec.ca/pdf/CME_pandemic_Guide.pdf)

Also see Aviva Hardfacts:

A-5565 Business Continuity Planning

A-5604 Telecommunications and Business Continuity

## **Key Steps in Pandemic Planning:**

In the event of a pandemic influenza, businesses will play an important role in maintaining basic services. Here is a checklist to help reduce the negative impact an influenza pandemic may have on your organization. The following checklist identifies specific activities businesses can do now to prepare for this or any other emergency.

### **Step One. Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your business:**

- \*Identify a pandemic coordinator and/or team with defined roles and responsibilities for preparedness and response planning.
- \*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/descriptions, 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.
- \*Determine potential impact of a pandemic on company business financials using multiple possible scenarios that affect different product lines and/or product sites.
- \*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.
- \*Implement an exercise/drill to test your plan, and revise periodically.

### **Step Two. Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your employees and customers:**

- \*Forecast and allow for employee absences during a pandemic.
- \*Evaluate employee access to and availability of healthcare services during a pandemic, and improve services as needed.
- \*Evaluate employee access to and availability of mental health and social services during a pandemic, including corporate, community, and faith based resources; and improve services as needed.
- \*Identify employees and key customers with special needs and incorporate the requirements of such persons into your preparedness plan.

### **Step three. Establish policies to be implemented during a pandemic:**

- \*Establish policies for employee's compensation and sick leave absences unique to a pandemic (e.g. non punitive, liberal leave), including policies based on the recommendations of the regional health authority on when a previously ill person is no longer infectious and can return to work.
- \*Establish policies for flexible worksite (e.g. telecommuting) and flexible work hours.
- \*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.
- \*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.

## **Step four. Allocate resources to protect your employees and customers during a pandemic:**

\*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.

## **Step Five. Communicate to and educate your employees:**

\*Develop and disseminate programs and materials covering pandemic fundamentals.

\*Anticipate employee fear and anxiety, rumours 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.

\*Be familiar with Self Care.

\*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.

## **Step Six. Coordinate with external organization and help your community:**

\*Collaborate with the regional health authority to share your pandemic plans and understand their capabilities and plans.

\*Collaborate with federal, provincial and municipal governments and/or emergency responders to participate in their planning processes, share your pandemic plans, and understand their capabilities and plans.

\*Communicate with regional health authorities 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.