

Pandemic Flu Response – *guide to developing your plan*

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Introduction

The government recommends that all organizations have a business continuity plan to help minimize the impact of any disruptions. In the light of current advice from the World Health Organization (WHO) it seems prudent that organizations should prepare for a possible influenza pandemic.

There is much advice available but much of it in documents of 40 plus pages. This document is written to help you prepare a pandemic flu plan that will give your organization the best chance of continuing to operate and reduce the risk to your employee's health and safety as far as possible should the pandemic occur. But we do realize that time is at a premium and thus we have attempted to condense good practice from a few key sources together into one short, easy to follow document.

Seasonal Influenza – 'Flu'

Influenza is highly infectious and spreads rapidly. It is one of the most difficult infectious diseases to control because the virus spreads very easily from person to person. Common symptoms are the sudden onset of the following:

- Fever
- Chills
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny nose

The acute symptoms generally last for about a week, although full recovery may take longer. In the UK, seasonal influenza occurs during a six to eight week period in winter and affects 5%-15% of the population.

Avian Influenza

Avian influenza ('bird flu') is an infectious disease of birds caused by influenza. Although it does not (yet) readily infect species other than birds and pigs, scientists believe that human-adapted avian viruses were the most likely origin of the last three human influenza pandemics.

What is 'Pandemic Flu'?

A pandemic is the worldwide spread of disease with outbreaks or epidemics in many countries and most regions of the world. Pandemic Flu happens when a new strain of flu virus appears and there is low or no human immunity.

In the last century there have been 3 documented pandemics. The 'Spanish Flu' in 1918 caused c.20-40 million deaths worldwide (majority 20-40 year olds). 'Asian Flu' in 1957 and 'Hong Kong flu' in 1968 caused c.1.4million deaths and significant illness levels between them.

Although it is impossible to forecast the characteristics, spread and impact of a new influenza virus strain, it may take as little as 4-8 weeks for a virus to reach the UK. Once in the UK it will spread to all major population centres within 1-2 weeks, with its peak only 50 days from initial entry.

It is thus essential that all organizations take the time to consider how this event would affect them. The following pages document a few sensible steps which should be taken. Not every piece of advice will be applicable to all organizations; you will have to take carefully into account your size and the types of activities your employees undertake.

Developing your pandemic flu response plan

STEP 1: Plan for the impact on your organization

The aim of a Pandemic Flu Plan is to ensure your organization continues to provide essential services to your clients or customers – the list below is of things you should think about first – what would the likely impact be on your organization?

- Create a Pandemic Flu Team. Have defined roles and responsibilities for preparedness and response planning. Make sure the team is from a wide range of stakeholders. E.g. health and safety representatives, trade union officials. If you are a small organization this team may only be 2 or 3 people, but it should always be more than one – in case you are the first to get ill! There is a sample table at the end of this document for listing the team members and their contact details, a very simple but effective tool for the team.
- Identify the critical activities of your business. Include employees and other inputs that support those activities e.g. raw materials, suppliers, logistics, security. There is a template at the end of the document to help you think about this.
- Consider training ancillary workers (cross-trainees, retirees, temps, contractors). Develop plans for changes in demand for your products or services - both increases and decreases.
- Prepare for the likely impact of a pandemic on your financial situation using multiple scenarios that affect different product lines and / or production/delivery sites.
- Do a Risk Assessment. Analyze the impacts on the whole organization, as well as each of its parts. Realise that certain parts will be harder hit as they rely more on people actually being on site.
- Assess the impact of travel restrictions (local, national or global). Stay up-to-date, work out which will be the crucial sources of information and start tracking them early. (The Civil Contingencies secretariat and the Department of Health will both have websites to support you in the event of a pandemic).
- Create a plan for how you will tell both internal people and external people about your response to the pandemic. Review and update this communications plan periodically as it will change according to the types of activities you are undertaking.
- Test your plans and revise them if necessary.

STEP 2: Impact on your employees and customers

Up to 50% of your workforce may require time off at some stage over the entire period of the pandemic. Following the pandemic profile it is expected that it will build to a peak lasting 2-3 weeks where 15%-20% of staff may be absent.

Other staff absences could result from other illnesses, taking time off to provide care for dependents, family bereavement and fear of infection. The government may impose travel restrictions and advise schools and nurseries in an area to close.

Small business units (5-15 staff) or small teams within larger business are likely to suffer higher percentages of staff absences – up to 30%-35% over a 2-3 week period at local peak.

Although the above figures are based on previous pandemics remember that a new outbreak may not conform, so it's best to keep plans flexible.

- When estimating the total number of staff absent, consider demographics of your work teams, including the percentage that have childcare or other family care responsibilities, 'normal' absence levels and options for home or remote working.
- Assess your organizations need for continued face to face contact with your customers / suppliers and consider plans to lower the number and / or type of face to face meetings (e.g. video or teleconferencing instead).
- Identify employees and key customers with special requirements and incorporate them into your plan.
- Consider your customers' needs during a pandemic and whether to review your business model and arrangement to continue to meeting those needs (e.g. increase of mail ordering and internet shopping).
- Maintain a contact list of current suppliers and develop an alternate list of suppliers for critical supplies and essential resources and services.
- Discuss with your suppliers / sub contractors their Business Continuity plans, you don't need the detail but you do want to feel reassured that they have done some planning – remember your organization is only as good as those on whom it depends.

STEP 3: Establish policies during a pandemic

Now that you've done much of the pre-thinking you are ready to develop some actual policies that you will use during the pandemic. These may not be too different from your usual policies but they will need to be clearly communicated to the entire workforce so that they won't be confused. In the event of a UK wide pandemic the government will publish some advice on policies and you should be sure to be aware of these when they come into force. The following steps include likely government advice but will not cover everything; the key, as before, is to remain flexible.

- Establish policies for sick leave absences unique to a pandemic, including policies on when a previously ill person is no longer infectious and can return to work after illness (i.e. when they are no longer showing symptoms and feel better) and agreeing them with trade unions, staff representatives and other professional representative bodies.
- Establish policies for flexible worksites including working from home and flexible work hours.
- Establish policies for reducing spread of influenza at the worksite; these should promote respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette, increased cleaning regimes and asking those with influenza symptoms to stay at home.
- Set up authorities, triggers and procedures for activation and terminating the company's response plan, altering operations (maybe reducing operations in affected areas) and transferring key knowledge to relevant employees. This might include nominating deputies for key employees in advance.
- Establish policies for restricting travel to affected areas (consider local, national and international regions), and guidance for employees returning from affected areas.

STEP 4: Allocate resources to protect your employees and customers

In a pandemic, employers still have a duty to provide a safe place of work for their workers, remember the Health and Safety at work act! This means you should provide infection control supplies for the entire workforce, which will probably include at the very least, hand-hygiene products, tissues and disposal facilities.

- Maintain a contact list of current infection control suppliers and develop a back up list too.

- Consider more frequent cleaning on premises and make sure this is budgeted for.
- You may need to increase IT infrastructure in order to support more home working, remote customer access etc.
- If you have staff based overseas then you should create a policy on access to medical treatment for them and include any specific arrangements that need to be put in place. You should take into account the likelihood of reduced access to consular services during a global pandemic.

STEP 5: Communicate to and train your employees

Most of the hard work is done by the time you get to this step – but one of the most important parts comes next – all of this careful planning and thinking is only useful if your workforce knows about it and can act on it during a pandemic.

- Develop and pass out easily-accessible information about pandemic flu to your workforce, it should be appropriate to the stage of alert (e.g. signs and symptoms of influenza, most likely methods of transmission), personal and family protection and response strategies (e.g. hand hygiene, coughing / sneezing etiquette, contingency plans).
- Ensure that communications are readable and understandable by all.
- Give information to employees about the pandemic preparedness and response plan for your organization, including their role in this plan.
- Develop platforms (e.g. hotlines, dedicated websites) for communicating pandemic status and actions to employees, vendors, suppliers and customers. This will depend upon your size, but just having the ability to put pre written messages quickly onto your website will help.
- Anticipate employee fear, anxiety and misinformation and develop your messages accordingly.

STEP 6: Coordinate with external organizations and help your community

This last step is for when you are feeling that your plan is developed and ready. You can now begin to take on more of a community responsibility.

- Find out about pandemic planning in your region, for example through regional resilience terms and local resilience forums and liaise with agencies and local responders. Share best practice with other

organizations in your community as well as through industry associations

Finally

If you have got this far you have hopefully been pleasantly surprised that none of this is rocket science and that all that is required is some careful thinking and a bit of effort in the plan creation. You will find employees who are energized by being involved in this sort of planning exercise and you may even find some hidden organizational operational benefits along the way. Depending on your type and size of organization this may only have whetted your appetite and you will need to go on to find more detailed plans along with the planning tools and methodology required to develop them, but at the very least if you follow the advice in this document you will be going some way to lessening the impact of a flu pandemic on your organization.

Pandemic Flu Team contact details and responsibility table

Purpose: Coordinate and prepare a Pandemic Flu plan to ensure the impact of any disruptions are minimized

Objectives: Respond to the specific threat of a flu pandemic
 Establish arrangements for operating in a crisis situation
 Promote the health, safety and welfare of staff
 Maintain and test the plan

Members: Health & Safety, Trade Union official, Finance, HR, etc.

Quorum: 50% plus 1

Role	Name	Title/Dept	Responsibility	Email	Phone
Coordinator				Bus: Home:	Bus: Home: Mobile:
Team Member 1				Bus: Home:	Bus: Home: Mobile:
Team Member 2				Bus: Home:	Bus: Home: Mobile:

Sample Template for Critical Activities Ranking

Department:

Activity	Impact Areas							TOTAL
	Employee	Customers	Suppliers/Partners	Finance	Legal/Regulatory	Public/Community	Other	

1 – low critical impact 10 = high critical impact

Template for Critical Activities Assessment

Activity	No. employees currently performing services	No. remaining with 35% absenteeism	Risk High / Medium / Low	Work from Home? Y/N	Action Plan in Place Y / N
Critical					
Medium					
Low					

Critical: activities that can not be suspended
Medium; activities that can be suspended for short period of time (e.g. 1 month)
Low: activities that can be suspended for long period of time

Action Plan for Critical Services

Business Unit / Dept	
Contact	
Critical Activity / Service	
Action Plan	<i>e.g. Notification plan, communication strategy, staff relocation plans, use of other sector services, Monitoring & reporting etc</i>
Resources Needed	<i>e.g. staff, equipment, contracting out services</i>

This sample plan has been adapted from the UK Department of Health document *Pandemic Flu: A national framework for responding to an influenza pandemic*; The UK Cabinet Office *Pandemic Influenza, A checklist for businesses*, the Greater London Authority *Pandemic response plan* and The Business Development Bank of Canada *What businesses need to know about pandemic flu planning -A Business Continuity Planning Guide for Influenza Pandemic*.