

Pandemic Planning Checklist for Employers

Public health officials from around the world have warned that we are overdue for an influenza pandemic. Increasingly, health officials are talking not about “if”, but about “when” the next pandemic will occur. Therefore, it is essential that businesses and organizations make reasonable efforts to protect the health of their employees, safeguard critical operations and plan for this eventuality.

The Pandemic Planning Checklist for Employers aims to be a quick reference guide to assist planners in developing a pandemic plan for their organization. A more detailed guide, entitled *Guide to Developing a Workplace Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic*, can be found at health.gov.on.ca/pandemic.

Preparing Your People: Communication

- Establish a Crisis Management Team for your organization, which includes representatives from health and safety, human resources, facilities, external affairs/public relations and appropriate business units (the Crisis Management Team will oversee pandemic planning activities and will coordinate the organization’s response to a pandemic).
- Identify reliable government sources of information for your jurisdiction regarding influenza pandemic activity. Monitor the website of the appropriate government agency(s) regularly and ensure the Crisis Management Team is provided with the most up-to-date information.
- Have the Crisis Management Team meet virtually on a regular basis (via teleconference, videoconference, Internet meeting, etc.) before a pandemic occurs. This will make virtual meetings a common practice and will be easy to implement for infection prevention and control reasons during a pandemic.
- Appoint a representative group to coordinate the organizations’ communications. For internal staff communications, this group should include health and safety representatives. For external clients and stakeholders, this group should include external affairs/public relations.
- Communicate clearly with staff the risks associated with an influenza pandemic and the steps your organization is taking to plan and prepare. Where necessary, target communications to groups across the organization that may be impacted differently during a pandemic, ie. front-line service providers, critical staff, management, etc.
Possible subjects for staff communication could include:
 - Accurate and objective information on the risks and potential impacts of an influenza pandemic
 - Health and safety measures
 - Possible curtailment of services
 - Leave options for illness and care giving responsibilities

Pandemic Planning Checklist for Employers

- Appoint a designated manager to respond to staff/stakeholder questions regarding your organization's pandemic planning efforts. Make a phone number or email address available to staff to facilitate two-way communication.
- Communicate where appropriate, with stakeholders and clients on what your organization is doing to prepare for a pandemic and what services will be maintained should a pandemic occur.
- Identify what precautions your organization will take to limit transmission (see section on Health and Safety) for front-line service delivery in publicly accessible locations.
- Encourage external suppliers, vendors, etc. to communicate how they will continue to deliver the services your organization relies on during a pandemic. Where necessary, coordinate your organization's continuity plans with those of external suppliers, vendors, etc.

Preparing Your People: Health and Safety

- Identify managers or others with responsibility for health and safety pandemic preparedness measures and have them consult with your Joint Health and Safety Committee (or health and safety representative where appropriate) in developing measures and procedures for pandemic preparedness.
- Prepare notices in advance for posting at entry points during a pandemic, which would advise staff and visitors not to enter if they have symptoms of influenza.
- In consultation with your Joint Health and Safety Committee, implement appropriate infection control and healthy workplace policies within the workplace highlighting the importance of handwashing, cough etiquette, staying home when ill, etc.
- Ensure your organization has adequate supplies of protective equipment, if protective equipment is deemed necessary for the organization.
- Develop arrangements for use in a pandemic to restrict large gatherings of people and day-to-day close social interaction. Influenza is typically spread from person to person within 1 metre proximity. Therefore, limiting person to person meetings, properly organizing shift changes and altering work environments (ie. through physical barriers as necessary) will work to limit the spread of influenza within the workplace.
- Explore the option of eliminating or reducing travel during a pandemic.
- Develop policies around leave options for staff who become ill during a pandemic and for those who are required to perform care giving responsibilities.

Pandemic Planning Checklist for Employers

- Develop policies for escalated office, work space and facility cleaning to be implemented during a pandemic. See *Guide to Developing a Workplace Health Plan for an Influenza Pandemic* at health.gov.on.ca/pandemic for more information on cleaning protocols.
- Promote personal hygiene and the importance of handwashing among staff and stakeholders both before and during an influenza pandemic.
- Develop a strategy for managing influenza cases at work during a pandemic. The strategy must consider both the imperative of limiting the spread of influenza while at the same time respecting individual dignity. One consideration involves developing a **screening tool** to screen people entering the workplace. Appropriate health and safety representatives should monitor the health.gov.on.ca/pandemic website for information on screening tools during a pandemic.

Preparing Your People: Personal Preparedness

- Encourage managers and staff to take steps to ensure that themselves and their families are prepared for a pandemic, in addition to other emergencies.
- Post resources around the workplace to help employees develop personal preparedness kits, etc. Personal preparedness materials can be downloaded at health.gov.on.ca

Preparing Your Organization: Continuity Planning

- Identify the services and functions that are critical to the on-going operations of the organization.
- Identify what the organization's critical services and functions rely on in order to operate, ie. external suppliers, IT systems, staff and skill sets, etc.
- Determine if there are sufficient back-ups in place to ensure the continued operations of critical functions and services in the event of substantial employee absenteeism and potential curtailed services of providers and vendors.
- Estimate the potential impact that a pandemic could have on your organization. Impacts could include: an increase or decrease in demand for your product or services; large-scale employee absenteeism; reluctance of clients to enter offices, limited supply of a particular good, etc.
- Develop strategies that could mitigate the specific impacts that a pandemic could have on your organization. Some strategies could include:
 - Providing the necessary tools to enable employee to work from home
 - Implementing appropriate health and safety policies (see section on Health and Safety)
 - Coordinating continuity plans with external suppliers and vendors

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- Open communication with staff and stakeholders
- Other strategies noted above

For additional questions on what you can do to prepare your organization for an influenza pandemic, contact the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Emergency Management Unit:

Employers Hotline: 1-866-331-0339

Email: emergencymanagement@moh.gov.on.ca