



Pandemic Influenza

Basic information for Employers

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INFLUENZA**



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What is pandemic influenza?

- Pandemic influenza is influenza that spreads rapidly to affect almost all countries and regions around the world.
- Influenza pandemics occur when a new strain of influenza virus appears that most people have no immunity to.
- A new pandemic virus may be the result of an animal virus and a human virus mixing to produce a new strain. The animal virus usually comes from birds.

Pandemic influenza is serious because it will:

- Affect 15-35% of the population
- Last a long time
- Come in waves
- Not have a vaccine (initially)
- Disrupt our whole way of life

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"Ordinary" annual influenza

-vs-

Pandemic influenza

- Ordinary influenza circulates most of time
- Causes annual outbreaks
- For most people, usually unpleasant, though not life-threatening
- Mutates slightly each year, but predictable

- A new strain, never seen by humans before
- Very different from usual circulating strains
- Changes cannot be predicted
- Therefore vaccine cannot be made until it starts

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How is a pandemic determined?

- World Health Organization (WHO) constantly monitors influenza activity and will declare start of pandemic
- Chief Public Health Officer at the Public Health Agency of Canada will declare arrival of new influenza in Canada
- Chief Medical Officer of Health will inform Nova Scotians when it arrives here

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How will a pandemic affect health services?

- It will place considerable pressure on health and social services
- Increased number of patients requiring treatment in hospital and community
- Reduced health-care workforce (ill health-care workers)
- Many workers will also need to provide child and elder care for their families

How will the community be affected?

All sectors will be impacted:

- Transportation difficulties, due to staff illness
- Shortages are possible (food, supplies, water)
- Impact on the economy will be huge

How will a pandemic affect business?

- Work absenteeism will depend largely on the age group most affected
- A quarter of workforce may need to take days off work due to illness
- Many workers will also need to provide child and elder care for their families
- Companies that provide critical services, such as power, food, transportation, and telecommunications have a special responsibility to plan for continued operation in a crisis.

Employers should be asking:

During a pandemic:

- How would we maintain core services?
- What happens if our payroll department is sick?
- Which staff members are essential?
- Could any staff do their jobs from home instead of risking infection by coming in?

- For more information on how to prepare your business for a pandemic or any other emergency, visit: <https://www.gov.ns.ca/emo>
- If you have questions or comments on pandemic influenza in general, please click here: <https://www.gov.ns.ca/govt/pandemic/contact.asp>

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