

# PREPARING YOUR BUSINESS

## A DISCUSSION TOOL FOR BUSINESSES IN PREPARING FOR PANDEMIC FLU AND OTHER EMERGENCIES

### SCENARIO

*Please note: The scenario below is framed around a moderate to severe influenza pandemic. It could also apply to other serious communicable disease outbreaks within a community. In addition, much would be equally applicable to a severe snow storm making transportation difficult, a flood, or other emergency.*

In this moderate to severe pandemic flu scenario, the H5N1 virus or another novel influenza virus in Asia has developed the ability to spread effectively person to person. International attempts at containing the virus have slowed its geographic spread, but were unable to stop the development of the next pandemic. Countries around the world are having difficulty managing outbreaks of illness. International travel is limited. Some supply chains are becoming impacted. Illness is now becoming prevalent in US cities and has begun to arrive in WV.

Disease is far more severe than seasonal flu. Both illness and death rates are high. Approximately 25-30% of the population is expected to become ill over the course of the pandemic. At least half of these individuals will seek medical care. Vaccine will not be available for 4-6 months. Antivirals have been of some benefit in treatment as well as prevention; however, supplies are limited and there are practical challenges to their use. While they are playing a role, they are by no means a stand alone solution. Health care systems are heavily impacted and stressed though still functioning. Many businesses are experiencing significant workforce absenteeism for a variety of reasons, with estimates that some could experience up to 30-40% of their workforce being out for the peak few weeks of illness within a community with lower rates before and after that time.

Experience to date is suggesting that early intervention is beneficial at slowing spread across a community, thus making weathering a very difficult situation as manageable as possible. Community containment measures recommended by public health include the following:

- Closing schools,
- Businesses adapting work practices to minimize disease spread and assure maintenance of essential community infrastructure,
- Ill persons staying home until fully recovered
- Household contacts of ill individuals staying home until 7 days following last exposure. (Those remaining at home are asked to minimize visits to public settings.)
- Large public gatherings / conferences are actively discouraged or canceled.

This first wave of the pandemic is expected to last 5-8 weeks. A second wave may or may not follow in a few months. The second wave may be more or less severe; the evolution of the virus is unpredictable.

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## PERSONNEL POLICIES

*Overarching question: What personnel policies are needed to both sustain your business through the event and to speed up economic recovery once it subsides?*

Things to consider:

1. How will your company handle leave time for ill individuals?
2. How will you handle leave for household contacts of ill persons asked to stay home (e.g., the worker with an ill family member)?
  - a. What are the implications if this is counted as sick leave vs. other types of leave?
  - b. Is it any different if they can work from home (telecommute) vs. if their function is one that cannot be done out of the office?
3. You have some personnel who are hourly, not salaried workers. Will hourly workers stay home for up to a couple of weeks given the potential loss of income? What are the implications to your work force if they don't stay home, as requested? How could you minimize these implications?
4. How can your company communicate with staff asked to stay home? How important is it for you to do so?
5. What other policies and procedures are critical?

**List at least one thing you will do related to this when you leave here today:**

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## EMPLOYEE SAFETY AND COMMUNICATIONS

*Overarching Questions: What are your responsibilities related to employee safety in pandemic flu? How can you maximize safety of your employees? What can and should be done in advance vs. at the time of the event?*

Things to consider:

1. What is your business' responsibility to protect the health of your employees during a flu pandemic? What about their families?
  - a. What are the implications of not doing so?
  - b. What actions could you take to help protect your employees during a flu pandemic (e.g., work practice and engineering controls, administrative controls, personal protective equipment consistent with job risk and worksite recommendations, etc.)?
  - c. Are there actions you could or should take in advance to demonstrate your interest in and commitment to employee safety?
2. What adaptations could you make to the way you do business that would reduce the risk of disease transmission in the work setting during a flu pandemic?
3. How will you handle the employee who becomes ill while at work? Do you need any supplies or equipment to assist with this?
4. Can you readily communicate with all your staff when off the premises? How important is it for you to be able to do so? What's your role in providing accurate, up to date information on the pandemic to your staff?

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## CONTINUITY OF BUSINESS

*Overarching Question: How would you sustain your business through a flu pandemic if 30-40% of your workforce was unable to come to work for several weeks (ill, home caring for a family member, asked to stay home as a close contact to a case, etc.) and you did not have ready access to some of your standard supply chain items.*

Things to consider:

1. Would your business need to remain open during a severe flu pandemic?
2. If so, how would you handle having up to 40% of your workforce out?
3. What services would you deem essential to maintain? Which could you leave aside for several weeks to a few months?
4. What are the critical decisions that need to be made related to your business? Are there redundancies in place to make those decisions?
5. Are there critical supply chain items needed for your business' essential services to continue? Are there alternative routes to obtaining these if your usual supplier was no longer able to deliver them? Is there an alternative item that could be used if quantities nationwide were very limited?

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## SUPPORTING COMMUNITY RESPONSE

*Overarching Question: What role could your business provide to help minimize suffering, illness and death and / or to help sustain community infrastructure throughout a pandemic? How would you link into emergency response structures to make these services or goods available?*

Things to consider:

1. How could you support your own workforce and their families through a pandemic to minimize the burden on state governmental response functions?
2. What supplies could you potentially make available to assist in your community? (e.g., food for those unable to get to store, material to support an alternate health care facility / home based care, etc.)
3. What services could your business potentially make available to assist in your community (e.g., transportation / delivery services, information dissemination, etc.)
4. What workforce support could your business provide to assist in community based response (e.g., checking on home bound individuals by phone, delivering supplies, supporting delivery of community infrastructure services, etc.)
5. How would you link these assets into your community's response infrastructure? Should someone know in advance what potential roles you could play?
6. Could your business play a role in planning community recovery? Is there a benefit to your business in seeing a faster economic recovery to the community? How could you impact this?

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## RESOURCES

### **WV Pandemic Influenza Website:** <http://www.wvflu.org>

This site includes WV specific information (in state events, presentations and slide shows given in state, state activities, links to WV seasonal influenza data, etc.).

It also links to the federal Pandemic Influenza Website below.

### **US Pandemic Influenza Website:** <http://www.pandemicflu.gov>

Under “Workplace Planning” this site includes information such as the following...

[Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for an Influenza Pandemic](#) (Occupational Safety & Health Administration). Provides guidance and recommendations on infection control in the workplace, including information on engineering controls, work practices, and personal protective equipment, such as respirators and surgical masks.

[Community Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Mitigation](#) CDC guidelines on actions, designed primarily to reduce contact between people and actions that community government and health officials can take to try to limit the spread of infection should a pandemic flu develop. Appendix 4 contains information for businesses and other employers.

[Cover Your Cough](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)  
Includes flyers and posters, in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Chinese, Hmong, and Khmer.

[Stopping the Spread of Germs at Work](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).  
Basic precautions for protecting employee health.