

Pandemic Flu Preparedness for Business

Background

Influenza is a common cause of respiratory illness, requiring healthcare visits and hospitalization. During the influenza season, outbreaks of influenza can affect businesses in many ways. The purpose of this technical bulletin is to help businesses prepare for the presence of a pandemic influenza virus in their facility.

Introduction

Pandemic influenza is a flu that causes global outbreak, or pandemic, of serious illness that spreads easily from person to person. Pandemic flu can occur anytime during the year. It results from a new influenza virus that becomes easily transmitted from human to human. Because it is new, no one would be immune to the virus and it is anticipated that immunization would not be available. The disease might seriously affect people of all ages, not just the very young and the very old.

Transmission risk depends on the extent of pandemic influenza activity in the community and pandemic influenza activity in the facility. During a pandemic, reinforcement of good hygiene practices is critical to minimize the transmission of pandemic influenza. The pandemic influenza response for control measures will be based on pandemic influenza activity and transmission risks.

Preparing for a pandemic

A pandemic flu scenario should be included in your business continuity program and include the following elements:

- Establish a coordinator or team with defined roles and responsibilities for dealing with an outbreak.
- Identify key employees, processes, suppliers, etc. that are needed to maintain critical business operations.
- Evaluate the potential business impact of a pandemic to your company. Will there be an increased or decreased demand for goods or services you provide?
- Develop a communication plan for: employees, customers, suppliers.
- Evaluate potential community health resources to help your company deal with a pandemic.
- Communicate with local and state public health agencies about any community contributions your business could make during a pandemic.

During a pandemic

During a pandemic, conditions may change at your workplace. It is important to continue to monitor the information and instructions given by public health agencies.

- Activate your business continuity plan.
- Monitor updates from the Center for Disease Control and other public health agencies.

- Promote good hygiene practices with employees. Companies may decide to provide additional items such as alcohol based hand cleaners, tissues, etc. throughout their locations to employees to help curb the spread of infection.
- Communicate updates with employees, customers, and suppliers.
- Be prepared and allow for increased employee absences due to family illness, quarantine (voluntary or mandatory) and community containment measures. This may require you to develop special compensation/sick leave policies to address the pandemic conditions.
- Consider alternative work strategies such as telecommuting, flexible work hours, staggered or reduced shifts etc.

Conclusion

By learning about pandemic influenza and defining how various planning assumptions might affect a facility's operations, a business operator can anticipate steps needed to mitigate such impacts.

The following resources can assist you in developing your plan:

Health and Human Services Pandemic Influenza Plan: www.hhs.gov/pandemicflu/plan.

General Pandemic Flu information and plans: <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/Pandemic/>.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration: http://osha.gov/Publications/influenza_pandemic.html.

Additionally, it is a good idea to review any state or local plans that may exist relative to your facility in order to incorporate them into your preparedness plan.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact your local PMA Risk Control Consultant.

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