PLANNING FOR A CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

A GUIDE FOR BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS

If the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to spread around the world, it could become a pandemic. Though global by definition, pandemics have local impacts. Pandemics can cause absenteeism, alter patterns of business and travel, interrupt supply chains, and affect the daily operations of your business. A pandemic isn't an isolated incident, but an event that unfolds over time, sometimes spanning many months. You can minimize the impact to your organization by creating a plan that clearly outlines roles, responsibilities, and policies.

INITIATE

Identify Plan Objectives

A well-designed plan can protect your employees and keep your business functioning during a disease outbreak.
Objectives might include:
- Reduce the spread of disease among staff.
- Protect people at higher risk for complications.
- Maintain business operations.
- Minimize impact on your customers and business partners.

Outline Key Business Functions

Determine what people and resources are required for your business to operate.
- What jobs are needed to carry on day-to-day activities?
- Who are your key partners, suppliers, and contractors?
- What raw materials does your business need to function?

Consider how your business will adjust if resources are constrained.
- How can you back fill positions if employees are absent?
- How can you accomplish critical tasks if key partners are unavailable?
- How can you adapt if your supply chain is interrupted?

Assess Workplace Exposure Risk

Identify health risks your employees may face.
In the course of their duties, are employees likely to:
- Have face-to-face contact with large numbers of people?
- Spend time in work sites, like health care settings, where they may come into contact with ill people?
- Handle materials that could be contaminated, like laboratory samples or healthcare waste?
- Workers with increased risk include those involved in healthcare, deathcare, airline operations, waste management. and travel to areas where the virus is spreading. Visit the OSHA webiste for guidance on controlling exposures among workers at risk: osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/

Review Workplace Policies

Ensure your policies are responsive and adaptable.
- Verify that your human resources policies align with state and federal workplace laws. Visit the Department of Labor's website (www.dol.gov/) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's website (www.eeoc.gov) for more information
- Implement flexible workplace and leave policies. Providing protected sick leave can limit the spread of disease in your workplace.
- During an outbreak or pandemic, adjust workplace policies to reflect public health recommendations.

IMPLEMENT

Apply Infection Control Measures

Before, during, and after an outbreak, create a culture of wellness.
- Place posters that encourage staying home when sick, cough and sneeze etiquette, and hand hygiene at the entrance to your workplace and in high visibility locations.
- Provide soap, water, and alcohol-based hand rubs in multiple locations and routinely refill.
- Instruct employees to clean hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer or by washing for at least 20 seconds.
- Supply tissues and no-touch waste bins.
- Ask employees to stay home when sick. Ensure that sick leave policies are in place.
- Routinely clean commonly touched surfaces.

Prepare for Social Distancing

Social distancing is an intervention to increase the physical distance between people and reduce the spread of disease. If recommended by Public Health, consider what policies and procedures your business can implement to accomplish work remotely.
- Allow telecommuting where possible.
- Permit flexible work hours (e.g. staggered shifts).
- Ensure that you have the technology and infrastructure needed to support multiple employees working from home.
- Trial telecommuting and flexible hours during normal (non-pandemic) periods. Identify and remedy problems that arise.

Plan to Separate Sick Employees

Employees who report having a fever or an acute respiratory illness upon arrival to work or who become sick during the work day should be separated from others and immediately sent home. Ensure that:
- All managers and employees are aware of your policies and the expectation that sick employees stay home.
- If possible, designate a separate area at your work site where sick employees can temporarily isolate. Use this space for employees who become ill during the work day and are awaiting transportation to their home or to medical care.

Anticipate Absenteeism

Prepare for employee absences resulting from personal illness, caring for ill family members, and dismissal of early childhood programs and K-12 schools. Be ready to adapt your business practices to maintain critical operations.

• Cross-train employees to carry out essential functions so the workplace can operate when essential staff are out.
• Identify alternative suppliers to meet supply chain needs.
• Consider prioritizing customers with the greatest needs.
• Prepare to temporarily suspend operations if necessary.

Plan for Restricted Travel
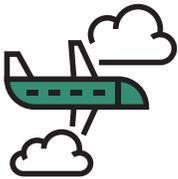
If there's evidence of an outbreak in the U.S. or to another business destination, you may need to cancel non-essential travel. Prepare to consult travel guidance on the CDC website: https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel. Consider:

• How can you accomplish work-related meetings or events remotely?
• How can you support employees who are abroad when travel restrictions are put into place, particularly those who become sick? Ensure you have clear policies for obtaining medical care during travel.

Encourage Professional Preparedness

Your business is only as healthy as your employees. Encourage employees to take standard steps to prepare for staying at home if needed:

• Store a two-week supply of water and food.
• Make sure to have enough prescription drugs at home.
• Keep non-prescription drugs and other health supplies on hand. This includes pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold aides, fluids with electrolytes, and vitamins.
• Get copies of electronic health records from the doctor, hospital, or pharmacy.
• Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would like to be cared for if they got sick, and what's needed to care for them at home.

INVOLVE

Establish a Communication Protocol

Determine how you will relay information about the outbreak to employees and business partners.

• How will you keep your workforce and partners informed about the outbreak, latest public health recommendations, and your response?
• How can you support employees and partners experiencing anxiety and fear?
• How can you prevent rumors and misinformation from circulating, and respond effectively if they do?

Develop a Process for Activating Your Plan

Decide when and how to activate and terminate your pandemic plan. Consider:
- Which decision makers in your business should be involved?
- What event(s) should trigger action?
- What procedures should be used to activate or deactivate your plan?
- How can you efficiently and effectively transfer business knowledge to key employees?
- When you deactivate your plan, how can you most effectively reintegrate employees who have been absent?

Prepare to work with local health officials when answering these questions.

Get Input From Your Workforce

Your plan is more likely to be successful if you get buy-in from employees and partners.
- Invite your employees to help develop and review the plan. If it's not possible to talk with every team member, try sampling a variety of departments in your organization.
- Test out your plan to help detect gaps or problems that need attention.
- Share your completed plan with employees. Explain what benefits are available to them, including paid time off, flexible scheduling, and health care coverage.
- Share your plan with other businesses in your community.

Stay Informed

Every disease outbreak is different, and the intensity of an outbreak can vary from one location to another. Stay alert to recommendations from federal, state, and local public health experts, and adapt your plan accordingly.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/
- Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (MODHSS): https://www.health.mo.gov/coronavirus
- Clay County Public Health Center (CCPHC) www.clayhealth.com/coronavirus

You can also follow the social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter) of these agencies for the latest updates.

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