

Preparing for an Influenza Pandemic: A Guide to Planning for Business



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SENIOR SERVICES

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The Case for Planning

You’ve invested significant time and resources into making your business work. Your business is important to you, your family, your employees, your customers and the community. So, it is important that you take the time and effort necessary to plan to protect your investment.

Public health experts agree that despite the recent 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, another influenza pandemic is very likely in the future. A pandemic arises when an epidemic of a new flu virus spreads and affects people around the globe. Because there will be no immunity from this new virus, and because there will be no vaccine available for several months after the pandemic begins, we are all at risk from the threat of a flu pandemic.

According to current projections, a flu pandemic could have significant impacts on businesses and society. Some of these impacts include:

- Absenteeism could reach as high as 30 to 40 percent everywhere.
- People may be sick for extended periods of time.
- People may need to stay at home for many days to care for sick loved ones.
- Schools and day care centers may be closed, perhaps for extended periods of time.
- Disruptions may occur in such critical areas as public safety and emergency response, fuel delivery and product shipping.

This guide was developed to help you begin the process of planning for a flu pandemic. By following seven simple steps, the guide helps you identify a variety of issues to consider, learn key elements to a flu pandemic business plan, and chart a course of action you can take now to prepare yourself, your employees and your business.

Getting Started

Step 1: Create an Emergency Planning Team

Your employees and co-workers are your most valuable business asset in helping to prepare. Create an employee emergency planning team, using people from all areas of your business. By involving employees in your planning efforts, you will keep them engaged in the planning process, they'll know and understand your plan, and they'll be able to share your planning message with other employees. When an emergency strikes, you'll have pre-trained employees ready to put your plan into action.



- Start by clearly identifying all your various business processes and functions. Focus on your “front-line” product or service production, but also on the most important support functions. Consider areas such as accounting, payroll, shipping and receiving, marketing and sales. If these are areas of your business that would be affected by 40 percent employee absenteeism, then they are areas that need to be included in pandemic flu planning.
- The planning team should include key staff members from the key areas identified above. They may know some portions of your business better than you. In any event, it's important to have your key people actively involved in your planning efforts. When an emergency occurs, they'll be better able to help you manage your business through the crisis, especially if you and/or key leaders become ill.

Step 2: Sharpen Your Planning Team's Focus

Within your business there are a number of different business activities and all of them serve a special purpose. In a flu pandemic, when large numbers of staff could be absent, you may not be able to continue work in a normal manner. Important business functions must become your focus.

- Identify the most important processes within your business—the ones without which your business simply cannot function.
- Discuss with your planning team the key areas of your business that must be able to continue functioning and which functions could be shut down when several employees are absent. By doing this exercise, you and your planning team will be able to keep your planning focused on those business activities that matter most.



Step 3: Assess Possible Threats to Your Business

It is safe to say that a flu pandemic will impact every business in some way. This is true since many businesses rely on other businesses for resources such as production parts, electricity, fuel, water, information or transportation.

In Step 2, your planning team identified the key processes within your company. Now it's important to assess the external threats to your business. The threat a flu pandemic poses to your business may be unique to your business, depending on the situation you are in when it strikes and how well you are prepared to respond. Be certain that when a flu pandemic does strike, your business will be affected in some way. Write down every impact you identify.

- List the individual functions that are likely to be directly affected.
- Make organizational lists by department and function (if you don't already have them) and use them to see whether you will have enough employees who can conduct your critical business activities should a large number of them have to be absent.
- Describe, in detail, how a flu pandemic could affect your business. For example, what would it mean to your business to have 40 percent of your total workforce absent for any number of weeks. Be sure to include people (like yourself and other key leaders) without whom you think your business would fail. This will make your plan more real and useful.

To assist you in creating a useful, effective business plan, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services has also produced a Pandemic Influenza Business Planning Toolkit. For more details on the Toolkit and other resources, see page 8.

Step 4: Determine Priorities and Create an Action Plan

You don't have enough time or resources to stop and address every one of the risks you and your team have identified. Take time now to list the items that are most important to your business and address these first. Some key areas for planning now might include:

- Your **employees** – What happens if employees cannot come to work for several days due to illness at home or other problems? Can you cross-train them to cover for one another? Can some employees work from home? How will long absences, payroll and other personnel issues be handled?
- Your **suppliers** – Your business relies on regular deliveries of materials and supplies needed to keep your business running. Do your suppliers have plans in place to keep the “pipeline” flowing?
- Your **delivery chain** – Getting what you produce to your customers is important. What alternate plans do you have if there are problems with your delivery system?
- Your **contracts and agreements** – Keeping formal/legal arrangements you have with your suppliers and client base is key to your business. Have you talked with those who are up and down your “business chain” to discuss what plans you might put in place should a flu pandemic impact your business?
- A **healthy workplace** – Making sure your employees stay healthy at work is important to your business. What steps can you take to maintain a healthy and productive workplace? How can you encourage your employees to practice good personal hygiene? How can you protect visitors and clients who visit your place of business? Consult with your local public health agency to better understand health issues in your workplace.

Keep working through your planning list and, as you complete key preparations, move on to your next most important item. Have all team members document the plans they develop as part of your overall company plan. It helps to have a written record of what you've done and how your plan was written, especially when it becomes necessary to review your plan or revise it due to changes in your business.

Step 5: Share Your Plan

Your employees are smart, talented and eager to help.

- Share the plans you develop with your employees. They want to know that you take this threat seriously and are taking action to protect them, their jobs and your business. They want to know what their role is should a flu pandemic occur. They will also want to know what they can do to help you maintain your business operations.
- Put your plan in a format that can easily be updated and improved, then make it available to all employees. Each employee should have a copy.
- Ask your employees to think of ways to improve your plan. The more engaged your employees are, the better prepared your business will be when a flu pandemic happens.
- Be sure each employee is personally prepared for emergencies. Free emergency and pandemic flu planning materials for individuals and families are available from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services' web site at health.mo.gov/emergencies/readyin3 and health.mo.gov/emergencies/panflu/pangen.php.
- Consider providing your employees training in emergency planning as part of an employee development program. Contact your local Red Cross, city or county public safety or emergency response departments, or your local public health agency for more information.

Step 6: Practice

No plan is effective unless everyone on the team understands the plan, their part in it and practices.

- At least once a year, take time to re-assemble your employee planning team to review your plan and practice it. This regular plan review serves several important purposes such as:
 - Helping to ensure your plan works the way you and your team intend.
 - Finding weaknesses and missing elements in your plan.
 - Keeping the plan up-to-date with any changes in your business.
- Make sure that all employees receive updated versions of the plan.
- Inform new employees of the plan and the role they play in it.

Step 7: Refresh

So now that you have finished the process, remember to:

- Continue planning as part of your "way of doing business."
- Practice your plan regularly to keep it (and you) ready.
- Improve your plan as you find issues to be addressed and as your business changes.

Remember, for a plan to be successful, it must be read, practiced and kept up-to-date.

Other Information Resources

Pandemic Influenza Business Planning Toolkit

To assist you in creating a useful, effective business plan, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services has also produced a Pandemic Influenza Business Planning Toolkit. Developed as a companion to this business planning guide, the toolkit provides detailed information on specific business areas to be addressed when planning and helpful forms that will guide you through the pandemic flu planning process. The toolkit can be accessed at health.mo.gov/emergencies/panflu/panbusiness.php.

Preparing for Pandemic Flu: A Community Guide

To help Missouri families and individuals learn about and plan for pandemic flu, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services developed a free, 12-page booklet that provides tips for creating family response plans and helpful lists for developing emergency supplies of food, water and other necessities. Also included are simple steps to help protect yourself against the spread of flu, as well as an explanation of the differences between seasonal flu, avian flu and pandemic flu. The community guide can be ordered at health.mo.gov/emergencies/readyin3/mainreadyform.php or by calling 573-526-4768.

Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

health.mo.gov/emergencies/panflu/pangen.php
health.mo.gov/emergencies/readyin3

U.S. Government Site on Pandemic Influenza
pandemicflu.gov/professional/business/

U.S. Department of Labor
Guidance for Preparing a Workplace for an Influenza Pandemic
www.osha.gov/Publications/influenza_pandemic.html

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
www.ready.gov/business/

American Red Cross
www.redcross.org

About the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

The mission of the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services is to be the leader in promoting, protecting and partnering for health.



Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

P.O. Box 570, Jefferson City, Missouri 65102-0570

Phone: 573-526-4768

Email: info@health.mo.gov
health.mo.gov

To report a public health emergency, call 1-800-392-0272.
This toll-free phone number is staffed 24 hours a day,
seven days a week.

Alternate forms of this publication for people with disabilities may be
obtained by contacting the office listed above.

Hearing-impaired citizens telephone 1-800-735-2966.

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

Services provided on a nondiscriminatory basis.

Special thanks to the members of Missouri's Pandemic Influenza
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contributions to this guide.



The electronic version of this guide is available at
health.mo.gov/emergencies/panflu/panbusiness.php.