

Pandemic Planning: Establishing a Business Continuity Plan

With the recent outbreak of swine flu in Mexico and cases being reported in Canada, it is imperative that all businesses and organizations have an effective continuity plan in place.

The World Health Organization has now raised the pandemic alert level to 4 out of 6, meaning that there is evidence of increased human-to-human transmission. While the SARS outbreak in Canada made everyone more aware of pandemics and increased our preparedness, we need to continue to be vigilant. Now is the time to update your contingency plan.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce has been engaged with partners in preparing for future pandemics by participation in a working group chaired by the Public Health Agency of Canada. The Chamber has also been working with the International Centre for Infectious Diseases on a toolkit for businesses.

Developing an emergency plan is integral to helping businesses of all sizes protect their employees and business activities. The following checklist may be used to assist your organization as it develops or revisits its business continuity plan in the event of a pandemic.

- 1) Review your plan and ensure that core business activities can be sustained over several weeks in the event of high employee absenteeism;
- 2) Plan accordingly for possible interruptions of essential government services like sanitation, water, power and disruptions to the food supply;
- 3) Identify your organization's essential functions and the individuals who perform them. Develop a plan in the case that the people who maintain these functions become ill.
- 4) Maintain a healthy work environment by ensuring adequate air circulation and posting tips on how to stop the spread of germs at work;
- 5) Promote hand-washing and proper coughing and sneezing etiquette. Ensure wide and easy availability of alcohol-based hand sanitizer products and post signage to remind employees to wash their hands, do not cough/sneeze into their hands and encourage employees to stay home when they are ill.
- 6) Establish or expand policies and tools that enable employees to work from home;
- 7) Expand online and self-service options for customers and business partners;

- 8) Tell employees about pandemic influenza and the steps that the organization is taking to prepare for it;
- 9) Encourage employees to stay home if they are sick to stop the spread of illness and update sick leave and family and medical leave policies. Concern about lost wages is the largest deterrent to self-quarantine.

Links to pandemic planning information:

Canadian Public Health Association

http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine_200904-eng.php

International Centre for Infectious Diseases

<http://www.icid.com/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>

World Health Organization

<http://www.who.int/en/>

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