PANDEMIC VIRUS CONTINGENCY PLAN

Purpose

The purpose of the Pandemic Virus Contingency Plan is to minimize the health risk posed to employees, contractors and visitors from potential pandemic viruses and ensure on-going operation of essential business activities. Business continuity plans should be developed by business units and key support services allowing for specific circumstances of particular operational needs and locations.

Scope

This guidance document applies to all employees, contractors, visitors, facilities and operations. In addition, business continuity planning for a pandemic should account for significant impacts to supply chains, contractors, transportation resources and essential community services.

Background

Pandemic characteristics and impact

- **Widespread impact:** The impact of a pandemic is likely widespread, not localized to a single area; therefore, there may be little outside assistance
- **Not a physical disaster:** A pandemic is not a physical disaster. It has some unique characteristics that require implementation of activities to limit human contact such as restriction of movement, quarantine and closure of large public gatherings
- **Duration:** A pandemic is not a short event leading immediately to a quick recovery phase.
- **Notification:** Expect some advance warning from the pandemic's development in regional areas, but it is very possible that a warning period may be very short. Should a pandemic virus spread within areas of operation, it will probably be some weeks before the full impact on a workforce is felt, although there may be some early impacts resulting from closures of schools and similar containment measures
- **Primary effect is staffing levels:** Unlike natural disasters, where any disruption to business service provision is likely to be hardware-related, disruption to business operation in the event of a pandemic is anticipated to be mainly human-resource orientated. The operation should plan for up to 50% to 80% employee absences for periods of approximately two weeks at the height of a severe pandemic wave, and lower levels of absences for a few weeks on either side of the peak. Although it is difficult to gauge overall, a pandemic wave may last approximately eight weeks or longer.

Note that the pandemic may come in waves of varying severity over its lifetime.

Employee absences can be expected for many reasons:
- Illness/incapacity (suspected/actual/post-infectious)
- Employees may need to care for sick family members
- Employees may feel safer at home (i.e. to keep out of crowded places such as public transport)
- Employees may be fulfilling other voluntary roles in the community; and
- Employees may not have child-care options (as schools and daycares are likely to be closed).

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A pandemic may have other impacts on the operation. For example:

- Supplies of materials needed for ongoing activity may be disrupted

- Availability of services from sub-contractors may be impacted (this may affect maintenance of key equipment and is an area that merits close planning attention); and

- Demand for services may be impacted – i.e. demand for internet service may increase impacting network service while demand for travel activity may be reduced impacting business development.

The business continuity plan(s) need to be reviewed regularly to ensure that they have addressed significant employee absences and other pandemic-related risks especially as the pandemic progresses and further restrictions are put in place.

Contingency Plan

Pandemic Virus Planning - Scenario Assumptions:

- A pandemic may have multiple waves over the period of a year. Each wave may last approximately six to eight weeks with a peak period of two to four weeks

- During each pandemic wave, 20% to 50% of a workforce may be unable to report to work for two to six weeks. In addition, a significant number of workers (another 20% to 30%) may be required to care for ill family members and children whose schools and daycares may be closed, or they may be unwilling or unable to take public transit due to restrictions

- There may be a significant chance of employee mortality with loss of personnel

- Supply chains and contractors are likely to be similarly impacted and may not be able to provide services, or only at a reduced capacity

- Essential services – such as fire and police – will likely be reduced or unavailable due to increased demand

- Medical services will likely be oversubscribed and may not be available

- Countries and cities may close borders, severely restrict travel and may implement lock-down controls on imports/exports and quarantine procedures

- As transmission is documented, international and domestic travel restrictions may be applied almost immediately or within days as the virus spreads

- Assume an extremely short period of time for evacuation procedures. Plans need to be readily available and may require dedicated transportation

- IT resources could be stressed with remote work from home practices.

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Short, Medium and Long-Term Planning

It is not possible to predict exactly how long a pandemic may last. There could be more than one wave of infection during a pandemic period. Each wave could typically last six to eight weeks, building a peak in week four before abating again.

During the pandemic, estimates suggest that absenteeism will increase by 65%. An operation should plan for up to 50% employee absences for periods of about two weeks at the height of the pandemic wave and lower levels of employee's absence for a few weeks either side of the peak (a pandemic could last many months and may contain peaks followed by periods of reduced illness. Estimate 50% absenteeism at the peak of a significant pandemic).

To ensure business continuity, short term planning with a focus on health is paramount. Succession planning (in the event of employee deaths or long-term disability) and back-up planning are also essential. Emergency management and recovery are greatly facilitated if essential services are available without significant interruption.

Continuity planning for a pandemic should include:

- identification of essential business activities (and the core people and skills to keep them running) and ensuring that these are backed-up with alternative arrangements

- mitigation of business/economic disruptions including possible shortages of supplies; and

- minimizing illness in workers and customers

Identification of essential business activities, core people and core skills

Issues to consider include:

- identify the *essential* parts of the business

- identify the core people and number of people required to keep the essential parts of the business running

- identify enough replacements for people and skills if there is a high level of absence

- are there other resources (volunteers, retirees) that could be drawn on if necessary?

- can parts of the business run remotely using telephone and email?

- HR/Safety will be the core people to manage the pandemic contingency plan.

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Business Planning for Absence

Issues to be considered include:

- what arrangements need to be made to minimize risk to employees?
- operations will make the decision to shut activity down when absence rates threaten safe business continuity.

A pandemic may affect regions differently in terms of timing, severity and duration. Some regions may be hit earlier, longer or harder. Organizations may need to consider rotating service delivery from hard hit areas to areas that have been declared to be in a post-pandemic period.

Restriction on movement of people from region to region may be imposed. Thus, rotation of employees may be difficult.

Information Management

It is important to have key operation and management information stored in known and accessible shared locations. And ensure information is safeguarded and backed-up regularly.

Communications

Communication updates should be consistent and maintained with information communicated to specific audiences as follows:

- to employees
- business units within the operation
- contractors that come to site
- visitors coming to site
- public facing information relating to the organization's response as required

Protecting employees and visitors from getting sick

- restrict workplace entry of people with flu-like symptoms
- institute best practices on good personal hygiene and workplace cleaning habits
- increase handwashing supplies and materials on good handwashing practices
- stock and supply protective barriers (disposable particulate respirator masks, eye protection, gloves)
- educate employees about the differences in symptoms between influenza and a common cold (appendix)
- increase social distancing
- ensure a protocol in in place for employees who become ill at work
- ensure a protocol in in place for employees who travel out of country
- communication notices at all workplace/facility entry points advising employees and visitors not to enter if they have influenza symptoms
- advise employees not to come to work when they are feeling ill, particularly if they are exhibiting any influenza symptoms and consult a health care provider, if necessary. Workers who are ill should stay home until symptoms resolve

- set up a process for ensuring that ill employees have completed any required quarantine period and are healthy before allowing return to work
- communication notices about how to stay well during an influenza pandemic (i.e. posting notices and posters and distributing flu information).

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Personal Hygiene

Basic personal hygiene measures should be reinforced, and employees should be encouraged to practice them to minimize potential virus transmission:

- cover nose and mouth when sneezing and coughing (preferably with a disposable tissue or coughing into the elbow)

- immediately dispose of used tissues

- adopt good handwashing/hygiene practices, particularly after coughing, sneezing or using tissues and

- keep hands away from the face specifically the mucous membranes of the eyes, mouth and nose

Ensure that adequate supplies of hand hygiene products are available. This is a high planning priority as there may be interruption to the supply or shortages of soap and hand towels. Consider purchasing hand sanitizers and communicate hand and personal hygiene protocols to employee and visitors by posting good-hygiene posters.

Workplace Cleaning

During a pandemic, implement additional measures to minimize the transmission of the virus through environmental sources, particularly hard surfaces including sinks, handles, railings, objects and counters.

Look at other shared equipment. Do not share telephones, pens, staplers, calculators and other small office equipment. If possible, ask employees not to share these items or clean them with the appropriate cleaners and disinfectants. Wipe down photocopier buttons, door handles, light switches, etc. regularly.

Remind employees not to share cups and dishes. Provide appropriate cleaning supplies in lunchrooms so that employees can clean the table in front of them prior to eating and after they finish.

Remove all magazines/papers from waiting rooms and common areas (such as reception areas).

When a person suspected of virus infection is identified and has left the workplace, thoroughly clean and disinfect their work area/office, along with any other known places they have been.

Basic hygiene practices (including hand hygiene) are to be followed by cleaning staff. Protocols for the use of personal protection equipment and methods for waste disposal must be followed.

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Increase Social Distancing

Another strategy to protect employees is to minimize their contact with others. Crowded places and large gatherings of people should be avoided, whether in internal or external spaces. A distance of at least two metres or six feet should be maintained between persons whenever practical.

Larger distances are more effective. Visiting or other contact with unwell people should be avoided where practicable.

Following are suggestions on how to minimize contact:

- avoid meeting people face-to-face – use phone calls, video conferencing, email, etc.
- use the internet to conduct business as much as possible
- avoid unnecessary travel and cancel or postpone non-essential meetings / gatherings / workshops / training sessions
- if possible, arrange for essential service employees to work from home (identify in your planning who these essential service employees are)
- avoid public transit: walk, cycle, drive a car or go early or late to avoid rush hour crowding on public transit
- bring lunch and eat at desk or away from others (avoid break areas and crowded restaurants)
- introduce staggered lunch breaks so numbers of people in lunchrooms can be reduced and appropriate social distancing can be maintained
- if a face-to-face meeting is unavoidable, minimize the meeting time, choose a large meeting room and sit at least two metres away from each other if possible. Prohibit shaking hands. Consider holding meetings in the open air if possible
- encourage employees to avoid recreational or other leisure classes where they might be in contact with infectious people.

Managing Employees Who Become Ill at Work

If a person feels ill, or if someone observes that another person is exhibiting symptoms of influenza at work, they are to contact HR by telephone if possible.

- Using the screening flowchart (Appendix), HR should:
- avoid visiting this person if possible – manage the process over the phone
- check if the employee has any of the symptoms outlined in the first section of the flowchart
- if the employee does not have symptoms like those listed, they are very unlikely to have influenza. They should be reassured but advised to call HR contact again later or to see their physician or health care provider if they are still concerned.

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- if the employee does have symptoms that match some of those listed, they should be treated as a *suspect case*. It may be helpful to have an employee influenza notification form (Appendix) completed, including details of any employee and/or visitors they have been in contact with. This information will permit the HR contact to identify recent movements and monitor well-being during the pandemic.

- the employee should be informed where they can find an N95 mask and instructed to wear it immediately. This is to help protect other employees.

- the employee should leave work and immediately contact a health care provider. This may involve phoning the person's normal doctor or nurse, or a specially designated centre to seek further advice (dial 811) The employee's supervisor should be informed that they have left work.

- the employee, should, if possible, avoid public transportation when leaving work

- the employee's workstation should be cleaned and disinfected

- Human Resources will set up a system to manage the absence and return to work of the employee and their contacts. Some issues to consider include:
  - Advice to the employees on how long to stay away from work
  - Decisions on the leave and cover arrangements
  - Checking on the employee during his/her absence from work.

Employee Travel

Any employee who has recently left Canada to any other country, including the USA, is required to:

- upon return, self-isolate for the duration specified for the virus (currently 14 days)

- contact their Supervisor to inform them of their absence from work and contact Pandemic Coordinator

- follow the instructions for self-checking for virus symptoms, which may include advice to telephone **811** (rather than visit) or contact a medical centre to seek advice immediately if symptoms occur

- report their travel history to the treating physician

- document all people they have been in contact with since returning to the Canada

- provide updates to pandemic coordinator during absence from work

- ensure time duration required for self-isolation is completed and is healthy before returning to work

- border closures overseas may also cause disruption to travel.

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Management of Change

Developing and implementing various controls to protect your workers from COVID-19 will also trigger a review of your safety management system to ensure that all safety program activities support your employee's health and safety.

Safety Management System revisions may need to be made in the following areas:

- Personal Protective Equipment Policy
- Emergency Response Procedures
- First Aid Procedures
- Safe Work Procedures
- Incident Investigation Interview Procedures
- Site Inspections
- Training (Classroom & On-the-Job)
- Worker Assessments
- Meetings
- Working from Home/Working Alone or Isolation
- Mental Health/Mind on Task
- Injury Management/Return to Work

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Appendix

Notification Form

Suspected Flue Case at Work

Details of Affected Staff

Name:	Worksite:	Location of isolation:
Job title:	Nationality if visitor to site:	Date of birth:

Address:

Telephone numbers:
Work: Home: Cell

Symptoms noticed:

Fever ☐   Body aches ☐   Headache ☐   Dry cough ☐   Cold ☐

Other details _____

_____

_____

Time of fever on-set: _____

Time of isolation: _____

Travel history over the past 14 days: _____
Countries visited: _____
Flights taken: _____

Where referred:

Contact List:		
1.	6.	11.
2.	7.	12.
3.	8.	13.
4.	9.	14.
5.	10.	15.

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