

## An Employer Guide for Preparing for Pandemic Flu



### eResources

#### Step 1 - Pre-Planning

- [Getting a Grasp on Pandemic Influenza - What It Means](#)  
*A collection of risk communications to provide companies context on the importance of addressing pandemic influenza*

#### Step 2 - Planning

- [CDC Pandemic Flu Business Continuity Guidelines for Employers](#)

#### Step 3 - Developing Controls

- [Protecting Personnel and Ensuring Business Continuity Chapter 9 of the National Strategy for Employers](#)
- [U.S. Chamber of Commerce Pandemic Planning](#)  
*This includes a 10-step guide and a number of employee health control recommendations*

#### Step 4 - Helping Prepare Employees

- [Individual Planning Guide for Employees](#)  
*A CDC guide to help prepare for a pandemic. You could make this available on your company's intranet.*

### Background

Some things in life are cyclical. Such is the case with influenza. Disease experts have calculated that, on the average, once every 30 to 40 years, pandemic influenza affects people globally, resulting in numerous deaths and interruptions to daily life and business operations. The last influenza was in 1968 and was considered to be the mildest case. The most serious was in 1918, resulting in the deaths of millions of people worldwide. Experts believe that we are due for another pandemic. Two viruses are currently being monitored by health officials, including WHO. One is a new strain of influenza virus – H5N1. It is referred to as “avian flu” and is found in birds. While birds can transmit the virus to humans, there has been no human to human transmission to date. If the virus begins to mutate, it could be transmitted from human to human, which could lead to a pandemic. The second strain of influenza virus is H1N1. It is referred to as “swine flu” and is found in swine. The swine flu virus is contagious and can be transmitted from human to human.

In the event of an influenza pandemic, business productivity and operations, including customer service, could be significantly impacted – as employees stay home or will need to be urged, through company policy, to stay home to limit the threat of infecting others in the workplace. According to the U.S. Chambers of Commerce, non-pandemic flu kills approximately 36,000-40,000 Americans each winter and hospitalizes more than 200,000. This costs the U.S. economy more than \$10 billion in lost productivity and direct medical expenses. These figures are minimal compared to what health experts and economists are now warning could happen. Experts say that a pandemic flu could kill more than half a million people in the U.S., hospitalize 2 million more and cost our economy an estimated \$70-\$160 billion.

### Strategy

To help our nation prepare for an avian pandemic, the United States has published its National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza. Its goals include stockpiling vaccines and antiviral medications, expanding early-warning systems and implementing local- and state-level preparedness initiatives against the threat of a pandemic. To help reduce the potential spread of the swine flu virus, antiviral medications and CDC interim guidance are available.

American business leaders play a key role in preparedness. Top federal and state agencies are urging all segments of society to prepare for a pandemic outbreak. The federal Departments of Commerce, Health and Human Services and Homeland Security are all involved in urging business leaders to plan and be prepared for a pandemic event within their organizations and business communities. Companies should be knowledgeable about the risks associated with the threat of a pandemic flu and to be prepared. Lack of preparedness could have a significant social and economic cost impact. To ensure maximum preparedness, businesses need to develop specific plans to protect employees and maintain operations during a pandemic. Businesses that provide critical infrastructure services, such as power and telecommunications, also have a special responsibility to plan for continued operation in a crisis and need to plan accordingly. As with any catastrophe, it is essential to have a contingency plan.

Additional Resources

- [Pandemic Flu Web Site](#)
- [OSHA Guide on Preparing for Pandemic Influenza](#)
- [OSHA Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response Guidance for Healthcare Workers and Healthcare Employers](#)
- [CDC Web portal for Avian Flu](#)
- [CDC Web portal for Swine Flu](#)
- [CDC Swine Flu: What's New Portal](#)

Resources

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has developed special guidelines to help companies and individuals prepare for an influenza pandemic. (See also page 1, left column, under Planning). The agency also provides two special Web portals for additional information – one for Avian Flu and one for Swine Flu. The Swine Flu Web site includes, among other resources, the availability to sign up for free email updates and CDC’s Interim Guidelines for reducing human infections associated with swine flu.

The Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) also offers guidance and the federal government has an official Pandemic Flu Web site, which is continually updated with the latest information about the status of a potential pandemic.



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## Avoiding Influenza with Good Personal Health Habits

Every year, up to 20 percent of the population in the United States contracts the flu virus. The effects of flu vary from mild symptoms to severe illness and complications, including death. Disease experts have calculated that once every 30 to 40 years, pandemic influenza affects people globally, resulting in a significantly greater number of illness and deaths than the annual flu.

### How Flu Spreads

Flu viruses spread in respiratory droplets through person-to-person or other close contact. Most adults can infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and from up to five to seven days after becoming sick. This means that you can pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Human influenza viruses generally can survive on surfaces for two to eight hours.

### Good Health Habits

Maintaining good health habits is important to keep you healthy and to minimize the spread of the influenza virus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other health organizations suggest exercising regularly, getting enough rest and eating healthful balanced meals, in addition to a number of precautions to help protect yourself and others from transmitting the flu. These precautions may include, but are not limited to:

- > Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Keep your distance from others to help protect them from getting sick too.
- > Stay home when you are sick. Prevent others from catching your illness.
- > Keep your hands clean. Wash your hands often and rub hands vigorously for at least 20 seconds. If you do not have access to water and soap, use alcohol-based gels or hand sanitizers.
- > Cover your mouth and nose. Use a tissue when coughing or sneezing to help prevent spreading the virus or, as the CDC suggests, sneeze or cough into your arm or sleeve. Viral droplets are less likely to spread doing this than coughing into your hands.
- > Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

For additional information visit the CDC Website at: [Stopping the Spread of Germs at Home, Work & School](#)

**For more information, visit our Web site at [travelers.com/riskcontrol](http://travelers.com/riskcontrol), contact your Risk Control consultant or email [Ask-Risk-Control@travelers.com](mailto:Ask-Risk-Control@travelers.com).**



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