



Iowa Department of Public Health

Mary Jones, Deputy Director



Safeguard Iowa Partnership

Jami Haberl, Executive Director

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PANDEMIC INFLUENZA PLANNING GUIDE FOR
IOWA BUSINESSES

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Iowa workplaces often have multiple locations/sites and some establishments may employ their own health staff, characteristics will vary from business to business, and need to be taken into account in adapting this plan to their own situation.

Guide Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to assist in managing the impact of an influenza pandemic on employees and businesses based on two main strategies:

- Reducing spread of the virus within business facilities; and
- Sustaining essential services

This guide provides recommendations for businesses to develop a pandemic plan including the following:

- [Background](#)
- [Planning](#)
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Background

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “An influenza pandemic can be defined as a global epidemic of influenza and it occurs when a new influenza (i.e. an influenza virus subtype that is not circulating widely in human beings) emerges and starts spreading in a similar way to normal influenza – through coughing and sneezing. Because the virus is new, the human immune system will have little or no pre-existing immunity. People who contract pandemic influenza are thus likely to experience more serious disease than that caused by normal influenza.”

Influenza is a highly contagious respiratory virus that is responsible for annual epidemics in the United States and other countries. Each year an average 200,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 die in the U.S. from influenza infection or a secondary complication. During an influenza pandemic the level of illness and death from influenza will likely increase dramatically worldwide.

A pandemic will not be like a physical disaster. A pandemic has unique characteristics when compared to typical disasters.

Widespread illness: the impact of a pandemic would be widespread. There may be very little outside assistance. Many business continuity plans (BCPs) assume part of the organization is unaffected and can take up the remainder of the workload.

Not a physical disaster: A pandemic is not a physical disaster. It has unique characteristics that could require implementation of activities to limit contact, such as restriction of movement, isolation, quarantine, and closure of public gatherings.

Duration: A pandemic would not be a short event followed immediately by recovery.

Notice: it is unlikely that there will be some advanced warning from the development of the pandemic overseas or in another part of the country, but it is possible for the warning period to be short.

Primary effect is on staffing levels: unlike natural disasters, where any disruption to business operation in the event of a pandemic is anticipated to be mainly human-resource oriented. Businesses should plan for up to 50% staff absences for periods of about two weeks at the height of a severe pandemic wave, and lower levels of staff absences for a few weeks on either side of the peak. Overall a pandemic wave may last about 8 weeks. There will likely be additional waves of illness of varying severity over time.

The impact of an influenza pandemic on the local economy and business processes could be devastating. It is likely that 15-35% of Iowa’s population will be affected. There is a potential for high levels of illness and death, as well as significant disruption to society and our economy, making planning for the next influenza pandemic imperative.

Assumptions

Predicted spread and severity:

- Illness rates in Iowa's population: 15-35%
- Global spread in: 3 months
- Vaccine availability: 6 months after initial outbreak
- Anti-viral treatment: likely to be in short supply and may not be effective

Potential effects:

- Large percentages of the working population may be unable to work for days to weeks during the pandemic.
- Diminished numbers of people and expertise
- Diminished emergency and essential services – fire, police, and medical personnel
- Diminished other services – retail, transport, government departments, etc.
- Schools, churches and other public places may not be open
- Schools and/or daycares may close
- Events may be cancelled

Business effects:

- Loss of people to operate the business
- Loss of services from suppliers
- Operations (e.g. production) and support (e.g. information technology) may be affected.
- Business travel may be affected as borders may be partially or fully closed, especially airports, leaving people “stranded”.
- Essential materials and supplies may be limited due to distribution chains that are affected by the travel restrictions
- Essential services around utilities, food distribution/access and banking systems may not be at “normal levels”

Short to Long-Term Planning

It is not possible to predict how long a pandemic will last. There could be more than one wave of infection during a pandemic period. Each wave could last about eight weeks. Businesses should plan for up to 50% staff absences for periods of about two weeks at the height of a pandemic wave and lower levels of staff absences for the few weeks on either side of the peak.

To ensure business continuity in a pandemic, short-term planning, with a health focus is necessary. Succession planning (in the event of staff deaths or long-term disability during the pandemic) and back up planning is essential. Emergency management and overall national recovery is 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.

Influenza Manager or Team

During an emergency, employees look to management to provide leadership for the company. Companies that do not have emergency plans often struggle with the chain of command because the company leaders have not had an opportunity to think through the effects of a crisis. Your organization needs to demonstrate to the employees that the leaders have a plan and are able to work together.

During a pandemic, many managers may be out ill or at home taking care of ill family. A plan should include redundancy for the specific measures identified as part of the response plan and those additional responsibilities need to be designated in the management structure.

However your organization decides to structure during an emergency, share this with your employees so they will have a clear understanding of who has the responsibility for various functions. Once employees are aware of the plan, their fears will be greatly reduced and they will be more likely to support the company in an emergency.

When planning for a pandemic, it is a good idea to identify one or more people in your organization who will be responsible for workplace health and safety. Some of the tasks the “Influenza Manager/Team” may perform include:

- Setting up a system to monitor staff who are ill or suspected to be ill in the event of a pandemic, including contacting staff who are unexpectedly absent from work.
- Setting up a process to facilitate/encourage the return of staff to work once they are better or at the end of the recommended isolation period; and

- Ensuring that your workplace has adequate supplies of tissues, medical and hand hygiene products, cleaning supplies and masks for people who become ill at work. It may be difficult to purchase these products once a pandemic begins.
- Creating, maintaining and exercising the Pandemic Influenza Plan for the company manage health related activities, coordinate communication and education.

Things to consider for your pandemic influenza plan.

- All planning activities should include input from labor/employee representative as appropriate.
- Provide a variety of measures to protect your employees and ensure that business operations can continue.
- Identify essential business functions and critical supply chains (e.g., raw materials, suppliers, sub-contractor services or products) that are needed to keep your business running. Plan how your business will operate if a high number of employees must stay home or if your supply chains are interrupted.
- Create flexible policies for sick leave, worksites (e.g. telecommuting), and work hours (e.g. staggered shifts) to promote social distancing
- Consider plans for the IT infrastructure needed to support additional teleworkers
- Consider changing business operations (e.g., possibly changing or closing portions of business in affected areas) and ways to transfer knowledge to key employees.
- Set up triggers and procedures for starting and ending your pandemic flu response plan.
- Consider setting up prominent notices at all entry points to facility, advising staff and visitors not to enter if they have symptoms of influenza.
- Create plan for what to do if an employee becomes ill at work or if someone observes that another person is exhibiting symptoms of influenza at work.

Communication

Communication during a pandemic involves both internal and external communications. Internal communication should be provided to employees to educate them about pandemic influenza and measures they can take to be prepared. It is likely there will be anxiety regarding a pandemic, which will contribute to increased work absences and/or increased distress to staff.

Risk communication is critical to inform employees regarding changes in the pandemic status. The following is one method for providing such information:

Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention

Advisory: provides key information for a specific incident or situation; might not require immediate action

Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action

The business approach to the pandemic influenza threat is to align with the local public health agency and the Iowa Department of Public Health recommendations to avoid causing unnecessary panic.

A primary communication channel will be the Iowa Department of Public Health website at www.idph.state.ia.us. Specific professional information for business health practitioners will also be made available both through this website and through your local public health agency.

Communication to Employees

- Communicate the possibility of a pandemic – and your organization’s preparedness to manage it – very early to staff.
- Discuss with staff possible health and safety issues, potential for stand down, and leave arrangements if they are ill or need to look after those who are or who have been “shut out” of childcare, schools, adult day care, etc.
- Have a comprehensive management plan in place which is clearly communicated to the staff. Ensure that communications management during the pandemic is part of the plan. It will be important to have systems in place to allow your organization to communicate in a pandemic.
- In activating your plan, provide clear, timely and proactive communication to staff, including how your organization is handling the situation.
- You may wish to establish a “communications or call down tree” so that people can keep in touch.
- Share links to relevant business or external sites
- Company policies for employee’s compensation and sick leave absences that may be unique of a pandemic.
- Share information with employees on what to do if employees get ill while at work

Key messages:

- Stay home if you are sick
 - a. CDC recommends if you are sick to stay home until at least 24 hours **after** you no longer have a fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius) or signs of a fever (have chills, feel very warm, has a flushed appearance, or is sweating).
- Encourage respiratory etiquette
 - a. Provide education and reminders about covering coughs and sneezes with tissues
 - b. Provide easy access to tissues and trash cans
- Encourage hand hygiene
 - a. Provide education and reminders about washing hands
 - b. Provide easy access to running water and soap or alcohol-based hand cleaners

Public Health Measures

Access to vaccines and antiviral drugs during a pandemic will be extremely limited, non-medical interventions may be the only way to delay the spread of the disease. Many of the interventions, however, may affect human behavior and human rights and therefore need a strong education and legal basis. Moreover, most of the interventions are based on limited evidence. Therefore, transparent decision-making and frank information-sharing should go hand-in-hand with the measures discussed in this section.

The key to make public health measures effective, involves providing information to employees on the threat of a pandemic, limitations of resources to combat the disease, and education awareness of the measures that need to be implemented. These efforts are intended to modify behavior so that utilizing these measures will be effective.

Social Distancing

Social distancing refers to strategies to reduce the spread of the virus between people; for example, postponing conferences, conducting meetings over the phone, working from home or staggering work shifts.

Strategies may include:

- Where operationally feasible, shift changes should be managed as follows:
 - When one shift goes off duty, there should be an interval before the next shift begins so that the worksite can be thoroughly ventilated and cleaned (either opening all doors and windows or turning up air conditioning/heating systems)
- Avoid meeting people face-to-face: use telephone, video conferencing and the Internet to conduct business as much as possible even when participants are in the same building
- Avoid any unnecessary travel and cancel or postpone non-essential meetings, gatherings, workshops, and training sessions.
- If possible, arrange for employees to work from home or work flex hours to avoid crowding at the workplace
- If public transportation is used, ensure good ventilation within the vehicle, wash hands often and ensure that everyone covers coughs and sneezes.
- Bring lunch and eat at desk or away from others (avoid crowded eating areas). Introduce staggered lunchtimes to reduce the numbers of people in the lunchroom
- Do not congregate in break rooms or other areas where people socialize.
- Minimize face-to-face interactions
- If face-to-face meetings are unavoidable, minimize the meeting time. Choose a large, well ventilated meeting room and do not sit close to each other if possible; avoid shaking hands or hugging.
- Set up systems where customers can pre-order/request information via phone, e-mail, fax or have order or information ready for pick-up or delivery.
- Encourage employees to practice social distancing outside of the workplace.

Isolation and Quarantine

Iowa Code section 135.144(8) provides the Iowa Department of Public Health with the authority to quarantine and isolate during a public health disaster. The Iowa Department of Public Health possesses independent legal authority to isolate or quarantine individuals or groups of individuals in the event of an outbreak of any quarantinable disease, even if the outbreak is not serious enough to constitute a public health disaster. (Iowa Code section 139A.4).

The process Iowa Department of Public Health follows to implement and enforce quarantine and isolation, is the same regardless of whether a public health disaster has been declared.

- 1) Definition of Quarantine and Isolation: It is important to understand the distinction between isolation and quarantine and to use the terms appropriately. Under Iowa law, isolation is the separation of persons who are showing symptoms of the disease, while quarantine is the separation of person who have been exposed to the disease. The terms are specifically defined as follows:

“Isolation” means the separation of persons or animals presumably or actually infected with a communicable disease, or that are disease carriers, for the usual period of communicability of that disease. Isolation shall be in such places, marked by placards if necessary, and under such conditions to prevent the direct or indirect conveyance of the infectious agent or contagion to susceptible individuals.

“Quarantine” means the limitation of freedom of movement of persons or animals that have been exposed to a communicable disease, within specified limits marked by placards, for a period of time equal to the longest usual incubation period of the disease. The limitation of movement shall be in such manner as to prevent the spread of a communicable disease.

Iowa Department of Public Health and local boards of health also have the authority to impose area quarantine, which is defined as follows:

“Area quarantine” means prohibiting ingress and egress to and from a building or buildings, structure or structures, or other definable physical location, or portion thereof, to prevent or contain the spread of a suspected or confirmed quarantinable disease or to prevent or contain exposure to a suspected or known chemical, biological, radioactive, or other hazardous or toxic agent.

Workplace Cleaning

- Office cleaning of shared work areas, counters, railings, door knobs, and stair wells should be performed more frequently during the influenza pandemic.
- Filters of the air conditioning systems should be cleaned and changed frequently.
- Telephones should not be shared.
- Specialized cleaning solutions are not essential. Standard cleaning products are adequate (including soap and water); most important is the frequency of cleaning.

Treatment

Influenza Vaccine

Public health officials will make the best use of available vaccine and will inform businesses and the public on how the vaccine will be used appropriately. It may take six months or more to manufacture the vaccine from the beginning of the pandemic.

Planning assumptions for the 2009 novel influenza A (H1N1) vaccine:

- Will be procured and purchased by the federal government and made available to vaccinators at no cost.
- You can assume that the vaccine will be administered beginning of the fall.
- Given the uncertainties around vaccine yield and formulation, it is not possible to provide specific numbers on how much vaccine will be available.
- It is anticipated that vaccine will be allocated to each state based on population. Based on the vaccine manufacturer planning scenario for the nation, Iowa allocation planning scenario may total 400,000; 800,000 or 1.6 million initial doses of vaccine.
- Vaccines will be shipped directly to locations designated by local public health agencies. The Iowa Department of Public Health will work with local public health agencies to determine ship to sites for the county allocations.
- The majority of the vaccine will be provided in multi-dose vials, the remainder in single dose vials or nasal sprayers.
- It is unknown at this time if two doses of vaccine will be required but for planning purposes assume that two doses will be needed for each individual.
- The current priority groups recommended to receive the vaccine include
 - Pregnant women;
 - Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age;
 - Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel;
 - All people from 6 months through 24 years of age;
 - Persons aged 25 through 64 who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza.
- The Iowa Department of Public Health will issue guidelines and standing orders for the administration of the novel influenza A (H1N1) vaccine based upon CDC recommendations and vaccine availability.

Anti-viral medication

Antiviral medications may play an integral role in the treatment and prevention of pandemic influenza; however, the certainty of their efficacy against a pandemic strain of influenza is currently unknown. Unlike the influenza vaccine, certain antiviral medications are already available; though there may be barriers in attempting to use them as a treatment and prevention tool in the event of pandemic influenza.

Implementation, Testing and Revision of the Plan

Writing the plan may seem the most difficult, but ensuring the plan works can only be achieved in testing the plan. There are numerous ways available to accomplish this, without having to wait for an actual emergency.

Implementing any of the following policy measures during the upcoming flu season will enhance the ability to respond to a pandemic outbreak.

- Place signage to stimulate good hygiene
- Track employee absenteeism
- Stay home when will
- Conduct employee training

Testing the plan can also be accomplished by conducting exercises. Exercises range from low stress to full-scale, hands on drills.

- A tabletop exercise is the easiest way to begin testing a plan. This type of exercise involves having discussions regarding a scenario that challenges the plan and the decision makers during an emergency.
- Functional exercises take on an additional level of complexity, in that they actually require participants to conduct functional components of the plan. This usually involves planning specific scenarios, creating pretend data and present issues that target an area within the plan to be tested.

Each of these methods of testing the plan requires extensive planning for the exercise and the evaluation. The evaluation is critical to revising the plan, by capturing actual responses during the exercise or drill objectively. Once this data is captured, an after-action report with recommendations to revising the plan should be completed within a few weeks of the exercise.

BUSINESS PANDEMIC INFLUENZA PLANNING CHECKLIST



In the event of pandemic influenza, businesses will play a key role in protecting employees' health and safety as well as limiting the negative impact to the economy and society. Planning for pandemic influenza is critical. To assist you in your efforts, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have developed the following checklist for large businesses. It identifies important, specific activities large businesses can do now to prepare, many of which will also help you in other emergencies. Further information can be found at www.pandemicflu.gov and www.cdc.gov/business.

1.1 Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your business:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify a pandemic coordinator and/or team with defined roles and responsibilities for preparedness and response planning. The planning process should include input from labor representatives.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify essential employees and other critical inputs (e.g. raw materials, suppliers, sub-contractor services/ products, and logistics) required to maintain business operations by location and function during a pandemic.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Train and prepare ancillary workforce (e.g. contractors, employees in other job titles/descriptions, retirees).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop and plan for scenarios likely to result in an increase or decrease in demand for your products and/or services during a pandemic (e.g. effect of restriction on mass gatherings, need for hygiene supplies).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine potential impact of a pandemic on company business financials using multiple possible scenarios that affect different product lines and/or production sites.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine potential impact of a pandemic on business-related domestic and international travel (e.g. quarantines, border closures).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Find up-to-date, reliable pandemic information from community public health, emergency management, and other sources and make sustainable links.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish an emergency communications plan and revise periodically. This plan includes identification of key contacts (with back-ups), chain of communications (including suppliers and customers), and processes for tracking and communicating business and employee status.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Implement an exercise/drill to test your plan, and revise periodically.

1.2 Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your employees and customers:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Forecast and allow for employee absences during a pandemic due to factors such as personal illness, family member illness, community containment measures and quarantines, school and/or business closures, and public transportation closures.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Implement guidelines to modify the frequency and type of face-to-face contact (e.g. hand-shaking, seating in meetings, office layout, shared workstations) among employees and between employees and customers (refer to CDC recommendations).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourage and track annual influenza vaccination for employees.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate employee access to and availability of healthcare services during a pandemic, and improve services as needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate employee access to and availability of mental health and social services during a pandemic, including corporate, community, and faith-based resources, and improve services as needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify employees and key customers with special needs, and incorporate the requirements of such persons into your preparedness plan.

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1.3 Establish policies to be implemented during a pandemic:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for employee compensation and sick-leave absences unique to a pandemic (e.g. non-punitive, liberal leave), including policies on when a previously ill person is no longer infectious and can return to work after illness.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for flexible worksite (e.g. telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g. staggered shifts).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for preventing influenza spread at the worksite (e.g. promoting respiratory hygiene/ cough etiquette, and prompt exclusion of people with influenza symptoms).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for employees who have been exposed to pandemic influenza, are suspected to be ill, or become ill at the worksite (e.g. infection control response, immediate mandatory sick leave).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for restricting travel to affected geographic areas (consider both domestic and international sites), evacuating employees working in or near an affected area when an outbreak begins, and guidance for employees returning from affected areas (refer to CDC travel recommendations).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Set up authorities, triggers, and procedures for activating and terminating the company's response plan, altering business operations (e.g. shutting down operations in affected areas), and transferring business knowledge to key employees.

1.4 Allocate resources to protect your employees and customers during a pandemic:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide sufficient and accessible infection control supplies (e.g. hand-hygiene products, tissues and receptacles for their disposal) in all business locations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhance communications and information technology infrastructures as needed to support employee telecommuting and remote customer access.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure availability of medical consultation and advice for emergency response.

1.5 Communicate to and educate your employees:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop and disseminate programs and materials covering pandemic fundamentals (e.g. signs and symptoms of influenza, modes of transmission), personal and family protection and response strategies (e.g. hand hygiene, coughing/sneezing etiquette, contingency plans).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Anticipate employee fear and anxiety, rumors and misinformation and plan communications accordingly.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disseminate information to employees about your pandemic preparedness and response plan.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide information for the at-home care of ill employees and family members.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop platforms (e.g. hotlines, dedicated websites) for communicating pandemic status and actions to employees, vendors, suppliers, and customers inside and outside the worksite in a consistent and timely way, including redundancies in the emergency contact system.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify community sources for timely and accurate pandemic information (domestic and international) and resources for obtaining counter-measures (e.g. vaccines and antivirals).

1.6 Coordinate with external organizations and help your community:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaborate with insurers, health plans, and major local healthcare facilities to share your pandemic plans and understand their capabilities and plans.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaborate with federal, state, and local public health agencies and/or emergency responders to participate in their planning processes, share your pandemic plans, and understand their capabilities and plans.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicate with local and/or state public health agencies and/or emergency responders about the assets and/or services your business could contribute to the community.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Share best practices with other businesses in your communities, chambers of commerce, and associations to improve community response efforts.

