

# An employer guide for preparing for pandemic flu

## RISK CONTROL eGUIDE



### 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

[Pandemic Flu Preparedness Tools](#)

[WHO Pandemic Phase Descriptions and Main Actions by Phase](#)

#### Step 3 - Developing controls

[Protecting Personnel and Ensuring Business Continuity](#)

*Chapter 9 of the National Strategy for Employers*

#### Step 4 - Helping prepare employees

[Key Facts about Influenza](#)

### 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 type of influenza virus is referred to as “avian flu” (strains include H5N1 and H7N9) 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 type of influenza virus is referred to as “Novel Influenza A,” or “swine flu” (strains include H1N1, H3N2, and H1N2). This “novel” 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 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.

### 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

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### Additional resources

[CDC Web portal for Avian Flu](#)

[CDC Web portal for Swine Flu](#)

[OSHA Safety and Health Topics: Pandemic Influenza](#)

[Pandemic Flu Website](#)

information – one for Avian Flu and one for Swine Flu. The Swine Flu Website 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 and Health Administration (OSHA) also offers guidance and the federal government has an official Pandemic Flu Website, which is continually updated with the latest information about the status of a potential pandemic.



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