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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.

Background

According to the World Health Organization (WHO),

“An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus appears against which the human population has no immunity, resulting in several simultaneous epidemics worldwide with enormous numbers of deaths and illness. With the increase in global transport and communications, as well as urbanization and overcrowded conditions, epidemics due to the new influenza virus are likely to quickly take hold around the world.”

Influenza is a highly contagious respiratory virus that is responsible for annual epidemics in the United States and other countries. Each year an average of 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.

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.
- Diminished other services – retail, transport, government departments, etc.

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.

Guide Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to assist in managing the impact of an influenza pandemic on employees and business 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:

- Communication to business from external or internal sources regarding the pandemic virus
- Activities to reduce the spread of the virus
 - o Reducing risk of infected persons entering the business facility
 - o Social distancing (reduce person to person interactions) i.e. postponing conferences, conducting telephone meetings.
 - o Cleaning of facilities.
 - o Educating employees to reduce concern.
 - o Handling employees who become ill at work and those who may have been exposed to the virus at work.
- For Travelers
 - o Travel advice
- Prevention/Treatment
 - o Influenza vaccine
 - o Anti-viral medication
 - o Antibiotics
- Maintenance of Essential Business Activities
 - o Identification of essential people and business functions.
 - o Planning for absenteeism and supplier disruption.
 - o Communication with employees and customers.
 - o Education for employees and customers.
 - o Short, medium and long term planning.

Communication

Business Communication for Professionals

- 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. Key: partner closely with the local public health agency and establish communication mechanisms.
- A primary communication channel will be the health website at <http://www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/flu.asp>. Specific professional information for business health practitioner(s) will also be made available both through this website and through your local public health agency; Local communication plans should be planned.

Communications to Employees

- Communications to employees should be managed per your individual

Business Continuity Plan.

- Communications may be via email, Internet and Intranet website, telephone, or postal services.
- Links to relevant business or external sites should be utilized.
- Educate employees regarding informational hotline numbers that may be provided by your company.
- The business should assure that all communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Educational communications should be provided to encourage employees to acquire and maintain regular healthcare services.
- Educational communications should be provided regarding company policies for employee's compensation and sick leave absences that may be unique to a pandemic.

Reducing the Spread of the Virus

- Reducing the risk of infected persons entering the work/business site
- Appoint a pandemic coordinator and/or team. This individual or team should have defined roles and ensures that preparedness and pandemic response planning occurs.
- All planning activities should include input from labor/employee representatives as appropriate.
- The pandemic coordinator and/or team should compose and maintain the Pandemic Influenza Plan for the company/business, manage health related activities, coordinate communication and education.
- Upon notification that a pandemic is occurring, the pandemic coordinator and/or team for each facility should do the following:
 - o Set up prominent notices at all entry points to facility, advising staff and visitors not to enter if they have symptoms of influenza
 - o Educate employees on how to stop the spread of the virus and notices may be placed around the workplace (including entrances, notice boards, meeting rooms and restrooms). Notices should contain information regarding hand hygiene, covering coughs and sneezes, and social distancing.
 - o Ensure adequate supplies of tissues, hand sanitizing gels, and cleaning supplies are available for employees.
 - o The pandemic coordinator should ensure that employee education includes a pandemic influenza fact sheet containing information regarding stopping the spread of the virus and performing effective social distancing.
 - o Shared work areas such as desktops, tables, door knobs, stair rails, etc. should be cleaned between shifts or more often if possible.

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 or working from home.

- Education on social distancing should be distributed to all employees.

- Where operationally allowed, 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).
- Social distancing strategies may include:
 - o Avoid meeting people face to face – use the telephone, video conferencing and the Internet to conduct business as much as possible even when participants are in the same building.
 - o Avoid any unnecessary travel and cancel or postpone non-essential meetings, gatherings, workshops and training sessions.
 - o If possible, arrange for employees to work from home or work flex hours to avoid crowding at the workplace.
 - o If public transportation is used, ensure good ventilation within the vehicle, wash hands often and ensure that everyone covers coughs and sneezes.
 - o 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.
 - o Minimize face-to-face interactions.
 - o 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.
 - o Set up systems where customers can pre-order/request information via phone, email, fax and have order or information ready for pick-up or delivery.
 - o Encourage employees to practice social distancing outside of the workplace.

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.
- Details of cleaning solutions can be found in the fact sheets on the IDPH web site <http://www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/flu.asp> “Recommendations for Business”

Educating Employees to Eliminate Concern

It is likely there will be anxiety regarding the pandemic influenza and this may

contribute to increased absenteeism and/or increased distress to staff,

- Suggested methods to address this:
 - o Educate employees on your business' preparedness efforts.
 - o As more information becomes available, provide timely updates.
 - o During the pandemic, continue to educate employees on the progress of the pandemic and its effects.
 - o As needed, assure support mechanisms are readily available to employees for example: mental health, social services and faith based resources.

Managing Illness in Employees

- Pandemic coordinators should post information on what to do if people get sick while at work.
- If a person becomes ill, or if someone observes that another person is exhibiting symptoms of influenza at work; make sure the ill person leaves the work place as soon as possible and that proper supervisor notification is completed.
- The employee should be encouraged to seek medical care and report back to pandemic coordinator if influenza is likely.

Travelers

Travel Related Issues

- Travel advisories are implemented by the Iowa Department of Public Health and should be communicated to all employees.
- Businesses should determine and enforce appropriate travel policies based on the Iowa Department of Public Health travel advisories.
- Advise will be provided to travelers abroad by public health officials.
- Advise to recent travelers will be provided by public health officials regarding self checking for symptoms and seeking medical care.
- Information concerning travel may be obtained from the Iowa Department of Public Health's web site <http://www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/flu.asp>.

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.

- Encourage employees to obtain the annual seasonal influenza vaccines.
- The Iowa Department of Public Health and the Center for Disease Control will provide advice on priority groups for pandemic influenza immunization.

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.

- The Iowa Department of Public Health will provide recommendations of the use of anti-viral medication.
- The pandemic coordinator should check the Iowa Department of Public Health's website for the latest information on the use of anti-viral medications and recommendations

Continuity of Operations

Your business' administration/management team should ensure that core functions, people and skills have been identified and that strategies are in place to manage these prior to the pandemic.

Business Plan Maintenance

- The plan should be reviewed and revised annually.
- The plan should be exercised and tested annually.
- Exercise results should be incorporated in to plans.
- Exercise and share your plan with your partners such as
 - o Your insurers
 - o Your health plans
 - o Local hospitals and healthcare providers
 - o Local public health agency