



## Pandemic Planning and Preparedness

A pandemic is a disease that is prevalent over an entire country or the world. Pandemic events can easily disrupt your organization's ability to conduct business and deliver products and solutions to your customers. The purpose of this document is to offer tips on pandemic preparedness planning and allow your organization to respond quickly and efficiently to a pandemic situation. A pandemic plan should be compatible and integrated with your organization's other Business Continuity and/or Disaster Recovery efforts. While not all aspects of the plan will be needed for all pandemic situations, it is a good idea to review and familiarize yourself with the topics listed below and consider how they may impact your organization.

### Resources

In pandemic situations, it is imperative to have reliable sources for information. Governmental sources such as global and national health organizations, and local health departments are a great place to start. For global and national pandemic situations, here are some resources you can use:

- World Health Organization - <https://www.who.int/>
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control - <https://www.cdc.gov/>

You should also look for more localized resources for your area. Most states have some type of informational website for public health situations. The list of state departments of health is here:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/publichealthgateway/healthdirectories/healthdepartments.html>

### Planning Phase

As with any Business Continuity Plan, the first step is to document all aspects of your business from a geographic and personnel standpoint. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Where (geographically) are my facilities and staff – include any remote workers or branch offices?
- What job functions can be performed remotely and what roles require staff to be in the office/field?

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- Which job functions are most likely to be impacted by a pandemic situation? Consider the following:
    - Employees who travel internationally
    - Employees who travel domestically outside the local area
    - Employees who travel within the local area and interact with the public as part of their job function (deliveries, service calls, etc.)
    - Roles without backups – any roles that only one person is trained/licensed to perform
  - What upstream/downstream dependencies are there? Consider:
    - Suppliers of products, parts, packaging materials
    - Contracted maintenance companies including janitorial staff
    - Shipping and delivery companies such as UPS, FedEx, etc.
  - Do suppliers/vendors have pandemic plans in place, backup warehouses, etc., in the event of an outbreak?
  - Do I have enough surplus Information Technology (particularly portable devices such as laptops)?

For any of the questions above, evaluate what actions can be taken in advance of a pandemic to alleviate or mitigate the impact an outbreak would/could have on your business. Again, relating to the questions above, consider:

- Can employees be routed to other offices in the event of a localized outbreak?
- Can we invest in technology or systems that allow employees to work from home?
- Can travel be limited by leveraging web conferencing services?
- Can employees be cross-trained to eliminate any bottlenecks or single points of failure?
- Can supplier contracts include redundant/backup supply warehouses to minimize disruptions?
- Can backup vendors be identified so they can be quickly activated in a pandemic situation?
- Can local temp agencies be identified to provide fill-in workers in a pandemic situation?
- Can I order additional laptops or other necessary technology devices to have spares on hand?

During the Planning Phase, it is also important to establish any HR policies that can be leveraged in the event of a pandemic outbreak.

- Sick leave policies
- Remote work policies including mandatory remote work for a pandemic situation
- Return to work policies for those affected
- Insurance information
- Recommendations for vaccination (when available)
- Any employee assistance policies and procedures

### **Alert/Monitoring Phase**

When a potential pandemic situation occurs, it is imperative to establish a clear response and communication chain. A good recommendation is to form a small task force to focus the efforts related to the pandemic. This task force should include those with area responsibilities such as Information Technology, Human Resources, Facilities, Transportation, Supply Chain, and Vendor Management. This task force should meet on a regular schedule to update the business on the status of the pandemic, utilizing the Resources listed above as well as any industry news. This team should also develop a clear communication system to advise employees that the organization is monitoring the situation and provide updates on the current status.

### **Pandemic Phase**

When a pandemic situation is underway, meaning that the situation is spreading to your area or toward the area of your supply chain, this is the Pandemic Phase.

It is imperative to act quickly and calmly during the Pandemic Phase, as the goal should be containment of the pandemic while reducing fear and panic. Pull together your task force from the Alert Phase – this team should be meeting frequently (weekly or more) to keep abreast of any new developments. Utilize the Resources such as CDC and WHO to get regular updates on the spread of the pandemic. Activate sanitation protocols as recommended by CDC and WHO.

Recommendations for most pandemic situations include:

- Hand hygiene recommendations
- Hand sanitizer stations
- Surface wipe-down/sterilization plans
- Signage/posters encouraging hygienic behaviors
- Encourage sick employees to stay home from work
- Provide guidance on when employees should return to work after an illness
- Encourage work-from-home
- Leverage web conferencing over in-person meetings in affected areas
- Restrict travel to areas with high incidence of outbreaks



As always, please refer to governmental health guidelines for the specific pandemic in question for recommendations. Communicate these expectations clearly with all employees to increase effectiveness and reduce fear/panic.

In addition to sanitation protocols, refer back to the other questions asked during the Planning Phase and see if any of the following steps should be taken based on your situation:

- Communicate with your employees to keep them safe and reduce panic
- Communicate with suppliers and vendors to ascertain their current risk level and supply situation
- Evaluate whether any Information Technology equipment needs to be ordered to facilitate remote work or have spares on hand during a prolonged pandemic situation
- Communicate with customers to demonstrate a proactive approach to the pandemic situation
- Identify next steps if the situation deteriorates
  - Shutting down common areas (break rooms, meeting rooms, cafeterias)
  - Spacing out employees – (i.e., six-foot bubble, every-other-desk)
  - Moving to shifts instead of one set schedule to reduce contact
  - Moving to remote-only operations for all or most staff
- Activate any backup strategies for suppliers, vendors, temp staff as needed

### **Recovery Stage**

Once the pandemic has subsided or run its course, you will need a plan to transition back to everyday operations. Depending on the severity of the pandemic, this may be a relatively simple process where everyone comes back to work or may be more involved if you need to switch back to primary suppliers and vendors. A couple of key tasks recommended during this phase are:

- Communication – let your employees, stakeholders, suppliers, and customers know you are resuming regular operations
- Lessons learned
  - What from your Pandemic Plan worked?
  - What didn't work?
  - What didn't you consider in your original plan that proved vital?
  - What roles need additional cross-training?
- Update your plan – use the information learned in the course of the pandemic to improve your pandemic plan going forward