

Preparing Workplaces to Minimise the Risk and Impact of an Influenza Pandemic

Department of Labour
TE TARI MAHI



The Importance of Planning

- There is no one, single pandemic scenario. Business planning needs, therefore, to be pragmatic and provide options for a business to respond to a range of scenarios.
- A pandemic will affect your business, your staff and your customers – just how much would depend on the severity of the pandemic, and how well prepared you are. Health experts (e.g. the World Health Organisation) tell us it's a matter of when, not if, a pandemic occurs.
- Successful planning will involve talking with staff working in the business, and with business suppliers and customers.
- Businesses will need to keep themselves informed of developments, and update their plans accordingly.
- Updating your business continuity planning will have wider benefits – it will be worthwhile in the event of other crises occurring.



Plan Like you Mean to Continue Business after a Pandemic

- It's important to remember the recovery phase – actions you take during the pandemic will impact on your ability to return to business as usual.
- Employment relations and health and safety laws provide the some minimum requirements, but on their own they don't provide all the answers in a pandemic - organisations need to take a practical and human approach.
- Work with your employees on a plan that will enable you to keep your business open as long as possible or, or if you are an essential service, remaining open right through the pandemic.
- Recognise the human dimension to a pandemic – people will have important and legitimate personal, family and community responsibilities (for example, childcare if schools are closed), so your planning will need to treat those as a reality to work with not an inconvenience to avoid or work against.
- You have to expect people to be concerned about contracting influenza during a pandemic – it is only natural for them to be concerned.



Managing Workplace Risks

- Good health and safety practices provide the best framework for helping you respond to the risk of infection, and giving assurance to people that all practicable steps are being taken.
- In a pandemic situation, the biggest risk (and, therefore, the thing to try and eliminate, isolate or minimise as much as possible) is close contact between people.
- Think about your workplace and what is practical for you.



Examples include:

- ***Eliminate the risk of possible infection***

- Enable more people to work from home, offer internet shopping and other self-service options (and prepare for more customers to use them)
- Work varied shift patterns, or flexible hours to limit the number of people in the workplace
- “Don’t be a martyr” – don’t come into the workplace if you are feeling unwell

- ***Isolate the risk of possible infection***

- Install screens
- Use ‘Night Service’ windows to remove direct staff/customer contact

- ***Minimise the risk of possible infection***

- Provide training and improve facilities to maximise personal hygiene e.g. hand washing techniques, foot-operated lined waste bins
- Consider the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where appropriate and practical for your workplace e.g. P2 masks, gloves and provide the associated waste disposal facilities
- Provide training and facilities to enable people to maintain social distancing i.e. so they are able to work far enough away from others to prevent cross infection.



Sources of Information & Guidance

- In addition to your own business networks, the Ministries of Health and Economic Development have a range of pandemic health and business continuity material available on their websites at www.moh.govt.nz and www.med.govt.nz.
- In addition, the Department of Labour has answers to frequently asked questions, and which will be individually searchable from the 'pandemic' link on the front page of its website www.dol.govt.nz. The Department will update this material from time to time, and you can register interest in any particular item and receive an e-mail update.
- The Department's website will shortly contain a range of practical scenarios outlining health and safety options for businesses to consider planning for and implementing during a pandemic, and practical guidance on workplace health, hygiene and safety management options, including the use of personal protective equipment.



NZ Workplaces - Key Messages

Key messages to take away today:

- Workplaces will need to be flexible in their response to potential pandemic scenarios – this requires planning
- Success requires workers and employers to work together cooperatively
- Workplaces can't rely exclusively on legalistic approaches
- The options employers and employees take during a pandemic will impact on their and our ability to recover from it

