



5-minute safety talk

Pandemics

What is a pandemic?

A pandemic is an infectious disease epidemic that affects a high proportion of the human population and spreads across a large geographical region, or even worldwide. Avian flu is an example of an infectious disease that has the potential to become a pandemic.

When a new disease emerges, the human population has little or no immunity to it and an outbreak occurs. The infectious disease spreads easily from person to person, causing serious illness, and eventually spreads worldwide in waves. Countries can only delay the entry of the disease through border closures and travel bans.

It is important for all businesses to be prepared. Today, we are going to talk about steps we can take to ensure the safety and health of our employees.

Prevention

Because we are unable to predict what the next pandemic will be and when it will occur, the following prevention guidelines are based on traditional infection control and hygiene practices.

To help prevent an outbreak, we encourage everyone to follow good health habits:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Keep your distance from others if you are getting sick or are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Clean your hands regularly.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Personal protective equipment can also help minimize exposure, when appropriate:

- Wear personal protective equipment like gloves, longsleeved coveralls, disposable protective shoe covers, or safety goggles.

- Wear at least the minimum level of respiratory protection.
- Follow proper containment and decontamination procedures when wearing personal protective equipment.

These guidelines may help prevent some exposures, but should never take the place of other prevention measures.

Intervention strategies can help reduce exposure and keep employees safe. Have the following items available:

- Tissues
- No-touch trash cans
- Hand soap
- Hand sanitizer
- Disinfectants
- Disposable towels
- Physical barriers like sneeze guards

Practices that can limit employee exposure:

- Discontinue nonessential travel to locations with high illness transmission rates.
- Use telecommuting to reduce face-to-face contact between employees.
- Schedule work tasks in ways that minimize exposure.
- Develop sick leave policies that do not penalize employees for staying home when they are sick.
- Develop emergency plans.

How to cope during a pandemic

Create an action plan that can help you and your company prepare for an impending pandemic — it is widely accepted that one will occur, it is just not known when. Make sure to plan properly to protect your employees and lessen the impact of a pandemic on your company.

What are components of an effective action plan?

1. Think about policies and issues that concern your employees, such as sick leave, loss of income, childcare, transportation, and loss of loved ones.
2. Make sure supplies are on hand in case public waterworks or other public services are not available.
3. Prepare for operations with a reduced workforce.
4. Develop policies and practices that minimize exposure of your employees to each other and to the public, such as minimizing face-to-face contact or working from home.
5. Identify business-essential positions and people required to sustain business-necessary functions and operations. Be prepared to cross-train or develop ways to function in the absence of these positions.
6. Provide easy access to infection control supplies.
7. Provide training, education, and informational material about employee health and safety.
8. Work with insurance companies, as well as state and local health agencies, to provide information to employees and customers about medical care during a pandemic.
9. Identify and organize a central team to serve as a source to communicate accurate information during a pandemic.

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