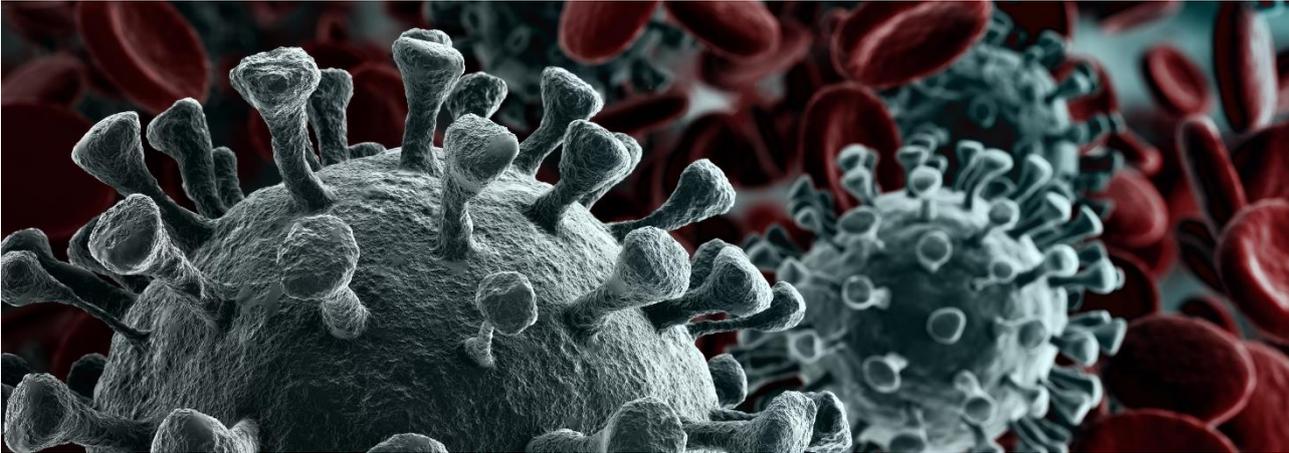


Organisational Resilience: Guidance on Pandemic Planning



In the event of a pandemic, all organisations have a key role to play in managing the risks to the health and safety of employees and maintaining essential operations. This Risk Topic has been developed to provide an overview of the steps that an organisation can take to prepare for a pandemic.

Introduction

A pandemic is the worldwide spread of a disease and occurs when a new virus emerges to which most people do not have immunity. Viruses that have caused past pandemics have typically originated from animal influenza viruses that have mutated to new forms able to affect humans. Pandemics are unpredictable but recurring events that can significantly affect communities and economies worldwide.^[2]

The current outbreak of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has been declared by the World Health Organization to be a public health emergency of international concern and has again highlighted the importance of preparing for a possible pandemic.^[3]

Effective planning is essential to help mitigate the risk and impact of a pandemic and to manage the response and recovery in the event that a pandemic occurs.

Discussion

It is important that all organisations develop robust and flexible business continuity arrangements that will help to minimise the impact of disruptions. Whilst the timing and extent of any pandemic is

- Major infectious disease threats in the 21st Century^[1]**
- 2003** – Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)
 - 2004** – H5N1 (Bird Flu)
 - 2009** – H1N1 (Swine Flu)
 - 2012** – Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)
 - 2013** – H7N9 (Avian Flu)
 - 2014** – Ebola Virus
 - 2015** – Zika Virus
 - 2020** - Coronavirus



unpredictable, the preparing of suitable response plans in advance will enable organisations to respond effectively to a range of scenarios and help to minimise the impact upon essential operations.

The following checklist provides guidance on the steps that an organisation can take to plan for a pandemic to minimise the impact upon business activities, employees and customers. It also includes advice on measures that may be implemented during a pandemic and the type of information and documentation that will require communicating to employees and customers.

The checklist is not exhaustive and further information is available from the references listed at the end of this document.

Guidance^[2,4,5]

Key Considerations	Guidance	Yes/No	Action Required
Planning for the impact of a pandemic:			
Has your organisation identified a Pandemic Co-ordinator/Team who will lead on developing emergency response plans?	Where possible involve a team of people and a wide range of stakeholders in the planning process (e.g. health & safety representatives, union representatives, local resilience teams and responders).		
Have you identified the critical activities that your organisation carries out which must continue during a pandemic?	Consider the employees required to carry out these activities, along with other key elements such as equipment, materials, suppliers, contractors and logistics. Do internal resources need to be re-allocated to ensure these activities can continue?		
Have you identified your key person dependencies and minimum staffing requirements?	Key person dependencies occur when the delivery of a critical business activity relies on one or a small group of individuals. Consider if more people need to be trained in the event that key persons are unavailable during a pandemic.		



Have you contacted your key suppliers and contractors to check if they have developed Business Continuity Plans?	As with your internal key person dependencies, you should also identify the key suppliers/contractors that support your critical activities.		
Is there a clear communications strategy and have you ensured that it is regularly updated?	Your strategy should identify arrangements for communicating consistently with all key personnel and stakeholders in the event of a pandemic. Key contact details (e.g. employees, suppliers, customers) should be maintained.		
Is it possible to utilise technology to reduce the need for face to face interactions during a pandemic?	Consider if measures such as homeworking and teleconferencing can be increased and if the necessary equipment/software is available to support this.		
Key Considerations	Guidance	Yes/No	Action Required
Have you tested your plan?	You should carry out exercises to test that your plan is effective and revise it as necessary to incorporate any identified improvements.		
Is there a clear process for activating the plan?	Identify the persons with authority for activating the plan and the procedure for doing this.		
Policies and procedures during a pandemic:			
Are there arrangements in place for the regular review of current advice from the Government on the specific health impacts associated with the pandemic?	Use the current advice to forecast and plan for employee absence during a pandemic. Consider other impacting factors such as school closures, caring for family members and bereavement.		



<p>Have you revised your sickness absence policy to reflect current Government advice in relation to the pandemic?</p>	<p>Review the current advice and establish specific policies, including consideration of the timescale after which affected persons are no longer infectious.</p>		
<p>Has the current advice from the Government on reducing the spread of infection been disseminated by the organisation?</p>	<p>Establish policies for reducing the spread of infection, based on current advice. Promote advice on infection transmission and respiratory hygiene and request that persons displaying symptoms remain at home.</p>		
<p>Do cleaning activities need to be increased and are the necessary materials and resources available?</p>	<p>Ensure that there are the necessary cleaning materials available and sufficient resources to support the increased frequency, along with a clear procedure for cleaning activities.</p>		
<p>Is there a clear policy, based on current advice from Government, on travel during a pandemic?</p>	<p>Use the current Government advice to develop a policy on international travel to affected areas during a pandemic, including managing the return to work of employees after travel to an area in which an outbreak has occurred.</p>		

Conclusion

Whilst the current outbreak of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has not yet reached pandemic status, it serves as a reminder of the importance of effective business continuity planning to minimise the potential impact on employees, customers and work activities should a pandemic occur. This Risk Topic provides general advice on planning and preparing for pandemic events, however, as with any emerging disease outbreak, it is likely that more specific, detailed information will be made available relating to the type and nature of a pandemic outbreak when it occurs. It is important that specific health advice issued by the World Health Organization and Government is considered when developing your response and that your plans are reviewed as necessary to reflect current advice.

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