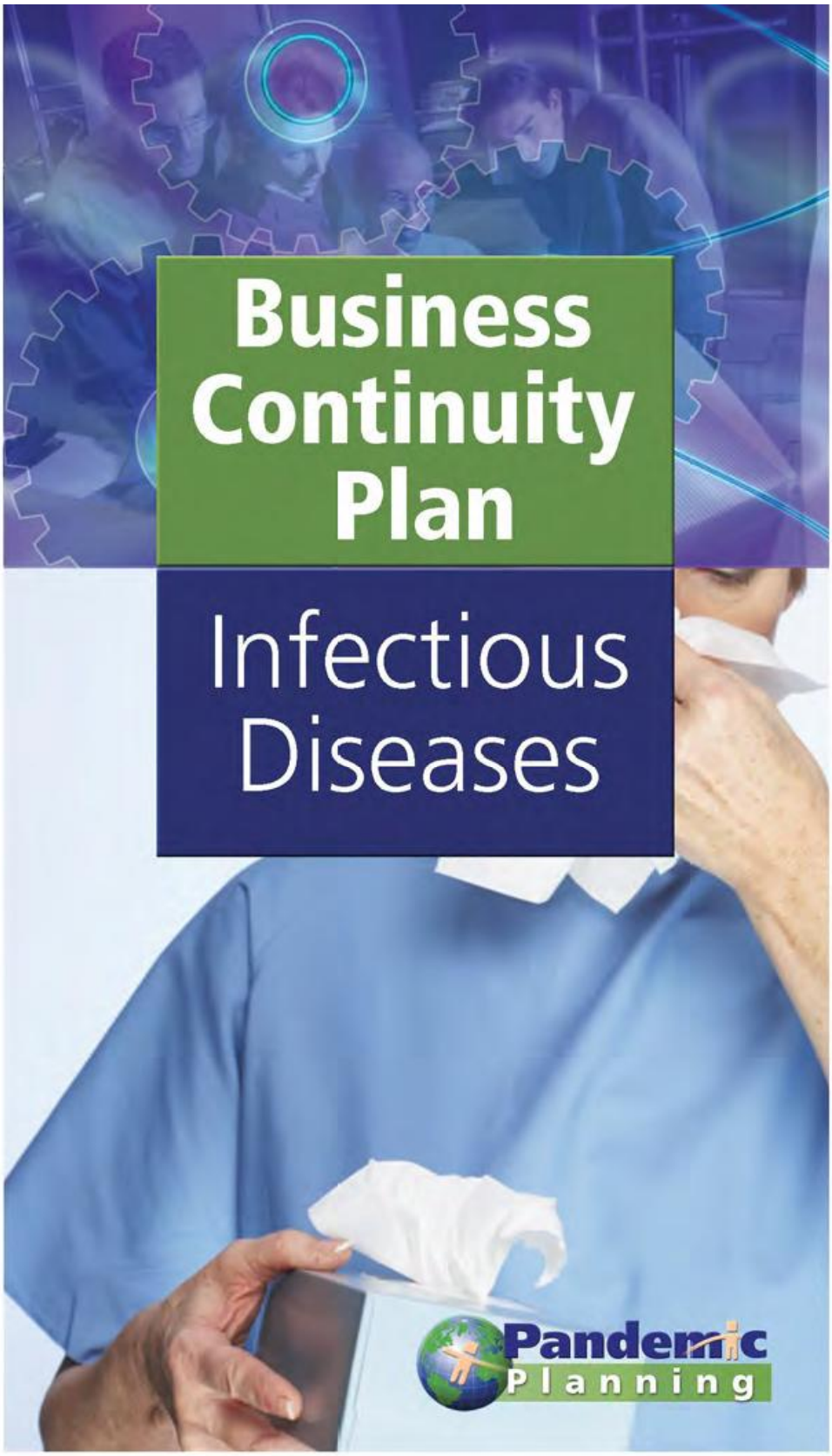
Business Continuity Plan

Infectious Diseases



CCOHS
Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

Pandemic Planning

Contents

What is a business continuity plan? 1

Is a plan for an infectious disease different than regular business resumption plan? 1

Why will people be off work? 2

If there is a pandemic flu, how many people will be off work? 2

What are some effects of a pandemic on a business? .. 4

What is included in a plan? 4

How do you set priorities? 6

What steps are needed for a business continuity plan? ... 6

1. Develop a clearly defined and documented policy ... 7
2. Develop a response plan 7
3. Implement 7
4. Test/Maintain/Audit 7

What are some examples of business continuity measures for a pandemic flu or other infectious disease situations? 8

What else can a workplace do in the event of a pandemic flu? 12

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What is a business continuity plan?

It is a plan that describes how an organization will continue to function during or after some kind of emergency, disaster or event. It involves planning how your key services or products can be continued, and the recovery of key business and systems.

Please remember... each business and operation is unique – the topics listed in this document are some basic suggestions. You will need to create a specific plan that best suits your business and operational needs.

This document focuses on creating a business plan for infectious diseases such as SARS or a pandemic flu. It is intended for non-health care organizations. Health care organizations, as well as other first response agencies (e.g., police, emergency, first aid, ambulance) will require much more rigorous emergency steps, infection control measures, and workforce plans.

Is a plan for an infectious disease different than a regular business resumption plan?

In some ways, yes. Traditionally, most business continuity plans focus on what will happen if the building, equipment, products or services are damaged in some way. The plans also tend to assume that people will be able to return to the building, or begin rebuilding, almost immediately after the event (such as after a fire or storm, or if there is a utility shortage (hydro, gas, etc)).

However, if there is a serious infectious disease outbreak, such as a pandemic flu, you must plan for the employees being unable to report to work (not damage to the building). In addition, during a pandemic, businesses, social organizations or schools may be required to take unique measures to help slow the spread of the illness including being closed by order of the medical officer of health or public health officials. Other public health measures may include limiting or canceling social and public gatherings, stopping public transportation, requiring quarantines, etc.

In addition, recovery from these situations may not be able to start immediately. It is important to be sure that your core business activities can be maintained for several weeks or months with limited staff. You will need to be prepared to resume your business in a planned way.

Why will people be off work?

The reasons will include the person:

- being sick or quarantined (suspected, actual, or post-infectious cases)
- fulfilling volunteer roles in the community, including helping with emergency services
- caring for school aged children (if sick, or in the event schools are closed), or other family members
- preferring to remain at home, or under mandatory order by public health
- avoiding of public spaces, including gatherings, and avoidance of public transportation

In a worst case scenario, they may have died or be on long-term disability.

If there is a pandemic flu, how many people will be off work?

It is impossible to determine with certainty – estimates vary because no one will know for sure how ill the new virus will make people, and how fast it will spread, or how many people will not go to work until it happens.

However, estimates range from:

- 25-30% of the general workforce for a time period of 1 to 3 weeks (estimate by the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters Association)
- up to 50% for 2 weeks periods at the height of a severe wave (and lower for the 2 weeks before and after) (Ministry of Health, New Zealand)

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) states that: "during an outbreak in a specific area, it would be appropriate for employers to plan for a total workplace absenteeism rate of between 20% and 25% during the peak two-week period with lower rates in the preceding and subsequent weeks. This contrasts with average total absenteeism in a normal winter of 8%." While this estimate is for the health care sector, it is a good estimate for every business to work from.

It is important to know that the pandemic is expected to come in 2 or 3 waves about 3 to 9 months separating each outbreak. Each wave is expected to last approximately 6 to 8 weeks. A pandemic may last in these cycles for up to two years.

The Public Health Agency of Canada also warns that, based on trends from past pandemic flus, there may be a higher that average number of illness and deaths in age groups different than what we typically see during annual flu seasons (for example, the 1918 pandemic flu resulted in more illnesses among people under 65 and in particular people aged 20 to 40 - unlike a "typical" flu that affects the very young and very old). If this historic pattern re-emerges, a large proportion of the workforce could be affected. Based on their model, an estimated 4.5 to 10.6 million Canadians would become clinically ill such that they would be unable to attend work or other activities for at least a half a day.

More information is available from PHAC's "The Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector"

What are some effects of a pandemic on a business?

Possible effects on business from a pandemic event can include:

- reduced labour supply, including your regular employees or availability of subcontractors or temporary employees
- customer orders (cancelled or not filled)
- interruption in getting supplies or materials (especially if imported by air or land, including goods that go through international borders and customs),
- change in demands (for example: increased internet use, decreased tourism/travel)
- reduction or restrictions on public meetings or gatherings (including sports, clubs, theatre, community centres, restaurants, religious gatherings, etc)
- restrictions on travel (regional, national or international)
- reduced availability of health care or home care services
- in more extreme situations, possible disruptions in other services such as telecommunications, financial/banking, water, power (hydro), gasoline/fuels, medicine, or the food supply

What is included in a plan?

How detailed your plan should be will depend on the type of business, how complex your organization is, and its size.

Essentially, you need to take a look at what is critical to your business. Determine h ow emergencies or events will impact your business. Remember to look at all aspects – for example, personnel, systems, site, supplies, transportation, utilities, etc.

Common areas to examine include:

Area	Action
Personnel	Identify and train "back ups" for essential (or all) functions, Plan for possible requirements for overtime from staff that are available.
Equipment	What is essential? Do you need new equipment? Do you need duplicate or "back up" equipment?
Availability of assets	Ensure that you have access to equipment, facilities, utilities, computers, machinery or equipment, tools, vehicles, communication equipment on-site or off-site. Includes ability to access systems from remote or home locations.
Availability of other "back ups"	Plan for other items. These needs could range from paper and/or electronic media, equipment (including off site facilities or storage), security, power generation, etc.
Business Commitments	Research possible contractual or legal implications for level of services or arran gements for non-performance of business agreements, etc.
"Chain of command"	Ensure everyone knows who is next in line for management/decision makers should someone not be available. The alternates must be trained to fulfill their roles in the plan.
Accounting	Ensur e continued payroll, finances, acconting systems.
Contact list for emergencies	Maintain an up-to-date contact list for your staff, and your clients.

How do you set priorities?

In general, when creating a business continuity plan, you must look at what is critical and how the loss of this critical element will affect your business. The "item" that is critical can be any thing or any one: personnel, systems, site, access to systems or the site, etc.

It is essential to completely understand your business:

1. Identify critical processes, operations, and functions.
2. Identify key internal and external "dependencies" — those things, people or other business you rely on.
3. Identify what else can affect your business.

How detailed or extensive your business plan is will depend on what priorities you decide upon. There may be some areas where you must maintain a fully operating back-up system, while other aspects may not be critical. Elements of a risk assessment process may also be helpful.

What steps are needed for a business continuity plan?

Once you have decided what elements of your business are critical and what the possible situations may be and the consequence of the loss of this critical element, you can develop plans to work around these situations.

Decide on your strategy — determine what your goals are for recovery or continuance of the business. What must be done in the short-term vs. long-term? Decide how you will overcome obstacles (contractors, facilities, on-site vs. off-site, etc). For pandemic planning, it is also a good idea to choose flexible solutions that cover a wide range of events as the true impact of the pandemic will not be known until it happens. Since the pandemic will arrive in waves, you may also need to plan for both smaller and larger absenteeism rates.

1. Develop a clearly defined and documented policy.

Plan for the situation	Action
Establish a pandemic management team. It is important to know ahead of time who will do what, and who will be the leader/commander.	❍ Yes ❍ No ❍ Not applicable
Appoint an "influenza manager" who can co-ordinate prevention efforts, keep track of staff and who is available to come to work, and he/she may be the person who is trained to determine the health status of employees (This person can assess if staff showing signs of coming down with the flu and when the employee should be sent home)	❍ Yes ❍ No ❍ Not applicable
Prepare for, and have training, in crisis communications and/or media relations	❍ Yes ❍ No ❍ Not applicable
Establish what your needs will be including contracts, level of service agreements, etc	❍ Yes ❍ No ❍ Not applicable
Cross train employees to help ensure essential functions can continue.	❍ Yes ❍ No ❍ Not applicable

More information about emergency planning in general is available in OSH Answers.

2. **Develop a response plan.** Write down what needs to be done and the resources that are required to implement the plan.
3. **Implement.** Circulate the plan, get feedback, and make sure that all employees know about the plan (education/awareness). Conduct any necessary training, especially for back up positions and for implementing the plan itself.
4. **Test/Maintain/Audit.** Try "desk top" or practice exercises. Allow back-up personnel to run the operations for a period of time. Make sure that there is ongoing review and testing of the plan, at least annually or more often if some aspect of the business changes.

You will also need to decide at what point your pandemic business plan will be "put into action".

What are some examples of business continuity measures for a pandemic flu or other infectious disease situations?

Remember to plan for how your business will adapt when other organizations and the community that you rely upon are also in the same situation. Remember, it is estimated that absentee rates may be as high as 50% with little outside resources available as a back-up (volunteers, contractors, temporary labour, etc)

Investigate:

Area	Options	Action
Flexible Work Options	when people cannot report to work but can work from home. Set up the infrastructure to handle people to work at home teleworking but to continue job duties via the internet or telephone	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
	Sequestering certain or essential staff	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
Alternative Staffing Arrangements	Postpone face-to-face meetings, and unnecessary travel. Try telephone or videoconferences instead.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
	Increase the distance between the customer and the staff member by installing a protective barrier (e.g., a window). These barriers may be acrylic or glass may provide useful protection for people such as front counter staff or public transport drivers, whose duties require them to have frequent face-to-face contact with members of the public	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	

Area	Options	Action
Alternative Staffing Arrangements *continued*	Create small working units to minimize their number of overall contacts. For example: A factory may keep a group of people on the same shift for the duration of the pandemic wave. Investigate having a period of time between shifts to allow time to clean all surfaces in the workplace before the next group of people enter the building (e.g., time to wipe tables, door knobs, shared telephones, etc.)	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
	Reduce the number of people per shift to allow for greater distances between people at workstations (e.g., factory or office stations may wish to stagger people so there is an unoccupied workstation in between each person.)	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
Alternative Ways to Conduct your Business	Are there aspects of your business that you can conduct using the Internet, or telephone more than you do now? Use telephone, Internet, video conferencing, or internet-based seminar options.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
	Can packages or information be shipped or delivered electronically (fax, scan) instead of hand delivered?	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
Transportation	If public transportation is not available or not recommended but staff are required to report to work, investigate car pooling or hire a private bus.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
Training	Cross train employees so they can effectively cover other duties.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	

Area	Options	Action
Training *continued*	Provide training in effective personal hygiene (including handwashing.)	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
	Provide supplies for handwashing and personal hygiene.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
Human Resource Issues	Communicate the importance of employees staying home if they Issues think they are ill, or if they are ill. Allow enough time for people to recover completely and return to work healthy.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
	Update sick leaves and family medical leaves. Make sure employees know exactly what your policies are for sick leaves or family care leaves and issues regarding pay. Communicate if the company will be following special rules for a pandemic situation.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
	Keep an up-to-date list of all employees for communication purposes.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
	During the pandemic, track which staff are available to come to work.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
	Have a trained "reserve" workforce. Do you have recent retirees that can assist, or can you train a number of individuals willing to serve on a contract basis?	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
	Hire the services of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or counselling services to deal with stress and grief related issues.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	

Area	Options	Action
Human Resource Issues *continued*	Be aware of health and safety, employment or compensation legislation, and any emergency measures acts, and how it may apply in a pandemic situation to your business.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
Management Issues	Document guidelines for what, how, who and when business decisions are made – remember, the pandemic can affect anyone.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
	Be prepared to make decisions about when to stay open, when to close to visitors, or when to close your business completely.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
	Be sure you have planned that core business activities can be sustained over several months. Remember that recovery may not be able to start immediately as it would in a localized short-term event.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
	Make sure that everyone knows their roles – managers, employees, union, health and safety committees, influenza manager, etc. to avoid confusion.	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	
	Security – Do you need to keep your building secure if staff are not present? You may be able to coordinate some of these functions with other local businesses in your building, area or industrial complex. For example, could a group of businesses share the cost of a security firm?	❍ **Yes** ❍ **No** ❍ **Not applicable**
	Responsibility:	

What else can a workplace do in the event of a pandemic flu?

Follow local and national news regarding the pandemic. Your local public health department or municipality will be able to provide information about conditions in your area.

In Canada, information will also be available through the Pandemic Influenza Portal from the Public Health Agency of Canada at http://www.influenza.gc.ca/ or by calling **1-800-454-8302**

Workplaces can help minimize the impact by implementing staffing measures as listed above, and by encouraging hand washing, and having or encouraging good hygiene practices.

For more information, please see the following OSH Answers documents:

Hand Washing: Reducing the Risk of Common Infections

http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/diseases/washing_hands.html

Good Hygiene Practices - Reducing the Spread of Infections and Viruses

http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/diseases/good_hygiene.html

Pandemic Influenza (Flu)

http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/diseases/pandemic_flu.html

Emergency Planning

http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/planning.html

Risk Assessment

http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/risk_assessment.html

Telework / Telecommuting

http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/telework.html