

Vitality!

EFAP NEWSLETTER



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Wilson Banwell - Human Solutions™

Preparing your business for a potential pandemic

The best business response to any emergency—fire, data loss, or pandemic—is to prepare a response plan and ensure clear communication with your staff and customers.



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You cannot pick up a newspaper or watch television without being told about bird flu appearing in yet another country and the resulting cull as nations try to avoid a serious pandemic. As the H5N1 virus makes its way around the world, people are beginning to imagine disturbing scenarios.

The potential for exposure is frightening, but panic is the true enemy. Any crisis – of any scale – is best mitigated by thinking clearly and being able to work from a plan. Governments and world bodies such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization are preparing emergency response measures and are encouraging businesses to do the same.

Pandemics: A Brief History

Every year in North America we experience an epidemic or *inter-pandemic*— we typically call it the flu season. A *pandemic* is a world-wide epidemic.

Pandemics have typically occurred every 10–50 years throughout recorded history, with varying intensity, duration, and mortality rates. There were three pandemics in the last century: 1918, 1957 and 1968. The Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918–1919 touched every corner of the globe eventually killing 20 million people. In 1957 an influenza outbreak killed nearly two million people, and about half that many died in a smaller pandemic in 1968. While these are high numbers, we need to keep them in perspective; according to the Centre for Disease Control, approximately 36,000 Americans die every year from influenza.

The World Health Organization has a 6 stage alert system for pandemics. With H5N1 we are currently at stage 3: no human-to-human spread of the virus. No one can say for sure whether the H5N1 virus will mutate into something easily spread amongst humans and trigger a global pandemic. However, preparing now for a future pandemic makes good business sense.

Protect Your Business: Prepare a Response Plan

“Many people plan for the worst-case scenario, but that’s not the way to go about it. Take incremental steps and build from there.” Donna R. Childs, *“Contingency Planning and Disaster Recovery: A Small Business Guide”* (2002, John Wiley & Sons).

The best plan for a pandemic starts with preparing for the annual flu season. The controls and education you would use as a matter of course during the winter months would be the same for a pandemic.

The need for a more detailed pandemic plan relates to the potential disruptions in goods and services and number of staff away on sick leave. Companies that are prepared for such an event and can enact a pandemic plan will be in a better position to assist their staff, ensure business continuity, and ultimately provide support to the broader community.

ESTABLISH A FLU MANAGER. Identify a person in your organization who can take responsibility for health and safety measures and give that person the time and resources to assemble a Pandemic Response Plan.

SUPPORT A HYGIENIC WORKPLACE. Even the deadliest of flu viruses are destroyed with soap and water. Washing hands, using tissues, and wiping common surfaces like door handles and telephones is a very effective first line of defence.

Stock up on hygienic supplies, including tissues, medical and hand hygiene products, cleaning supplies (to sanitize workstations) and masks (for infected individuals). These items may be difficult to obtain once a pandemic begins.

COMMUNICATE EARLY. Establish a communication plan for employees and business contacts. Provide current avian influenza information to all employees. Identify and make available information on community resources.

In the event of a pandemic, your employees will look to you for up-to-date information. Good communication with your employees is essential to avoid rumours and misinformation. Pre-build a web page that can go live in the event of a pandemic and include key contacts and a tracking system for employee status. Establish a phone tree in the case of internet disruptions.

Make certain you are especially clear about the importance of staying away from the workplace if they become ill. Preparing to address concerns, such as potential lost wages can be one of the largest deterrents to self-quarantine.

ANTICIPATE SIGNIFICANT STAFF ABSENCES. Consider the disruption to your business if one-third of staff are home sick or caring for their families. Identify key roles that need to be maintained and make certain other people can cover them.

CONSIDER TEMPORARY CLOSURES. Weigh the pros and cons of closing down the entire operation. If supply lines are cut there may be no other option. Determine the implications of being shut down for a week, a month or six months.

PROTECT YOUR STAFF. The first priority in an outbreak will be managing the health of your employees and limiting the spread of the disease within the organization. Educate staff of signs of illness and ensure that they go home immediately. Monitor staff who are ill. Track their progress by phone and help them arrange for somebody to provide care. Ensure that quarantine periods as set by your public health system are followed before returning to the workplace.

SECURE YOUR DATA. Back up essential files off site. Provide access to a network of key employees and be clear about what roles they will need to step into should other staff be off the job.

REVIEW EMPLOYMENT POLICIES. Know your rights and the rights of your staff in an extreme public health crisis. Can you require staff to stay away if they are sick? Are there clauses for business closures or emergency situations? Will you provide sick pay for an extended pandemic outbreak? What efforts can you expect from healthy staff who may not be able to report to work when public transit is shut down?

Pre-planning for a health crisis will put your organization in a better position to weather the storm and return to production once the crisis has passed.

Protect Yourself: Some Tips

The human race is resilient. We have survival instincts that emerge when we experience difficult times. It's heartening to note that people come together in times of crisis. In the aftermath of earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters, the best of our nature tends to come forth and we find ways to support one another. There's no reason to believe the same won't happen in the face of a flu pandemic. Below are some ways we can all help ourselves.

STAY HEALTHY. People who have learned how to cope with stress, stay healthy, are well-rested and in good physical shape are less likely to get sick.

STAY GROUNDED. It is important to remain calm, if and when, there is an outbreak. There is no value in panicking in a pandemic (or any emergency for that matter). Staying informed and keeping a clear head will serve you well. Remember, a serious outbreak of the flu will not happen overnight. Pay attention to updates and avoid acting on speculation or rumours. Turn to trusted sources for your information.

AVOID SPREADING GERMS. Get into the habit of properly washing your hands. As simple as this sounds, it's the most effective thing you can do to avoid passing on a virus. Most people barely run their hands under the tap, and that's not good enough. Take a full minute every time you wash your hands. Use soap and warm water, and make certain to include the back of your hands, under the fingernails, and between your fingers. Dry off with a single use paper towel or an air-dryer.

Wipe off shared surfaces with a solution of one part bleach per 10 parts of water. In the office, this includes desk tops, phones, computer mice, and handles and door knobs.

LIMIT PHYSICAL CONTACT. If a pandemic develops, avoid large group meetings, shared workstations and public events. Accomplish as much as you can in a single trip and do errands at off-peak hours. Make full use of available technologies such as email and telephone.

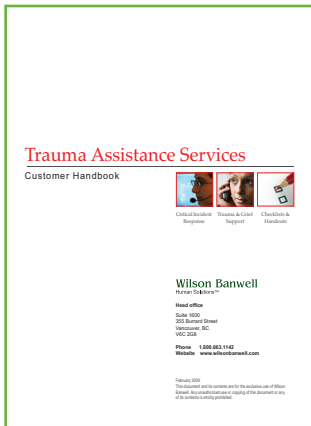
STOCK UP AT HOME. Keep a healthy supply of foodstuffs and medicines at home and store containers of clean water. If the power goes out or water is cut off, or if stores are unable to open, you and your family may have to get by on what you have set aside. Also store a flashlight, radio, and extra batteries.

BE INFORMED. Governments and community groups are aware of the potential of a flu pandemic, and there are plenty of resources available. A quick search online will bring up numerous links with valuable information.

KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOURS. In any serious disaster, community resources are key. Our modern society has succeeded in isolating ourselves in our own homes and immediate social networks are fragmented. You can help rebuild those networks by organizing a block party or joining a neighbourhood watch program.

Sources: Council of Foreign Relations: www.crf.org
Health Canada: www.hc-sc.gc.ca
New Zealand Ministry of Health: www.moh.govt.nz
Vancouver Coastal Health Authority: www.vch.ca
World Health Organization: www.who.int

More Resources



Our Trauma Assistance Services Guide can help you create a trauma response protocol.

TRAUMA RESPONSE PROTOCOL

Do you have an established trauma response protocol? If not, Wilson Banwell can help.

As part of your pandemic preparedness strategy, Wilson Banwell can directly assist you by working with you to create a protocol and providing you with our *Trauma Assistance Services: Customer Guide*. The contents of the *Guide* include:

- Important contacts
- Trauma Assistance Response Management Flowchart
- Critical Incident Stress Management
- How to arrange Trauma Assistance Services
- How to support employees following an incident
- Checklist for preparing debriefings, defusing, or grief support
- Handouts for dealing with traumatic events
- Stress response signs and symptoms

Contact your Account Manager for more information, to create a protocol, and/or for copies of the guide.

HEALTH CANADA. Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada publish a variety of up-to-date information sheets, including:

- **Avian Influenza Fact Sheet** (<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/anima/heasan/disemala/avflu/avflufse.shtml>)
- **Preventing Avian Influenza Spread on Your Premises** (<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/anima/heasan/disemala/avflu/bacdoc/prevente.shtml>)
- **Current Avian Influenza Affected Areas** (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/h5n1/index.html>)
- **Advisory: Health Canada advises consumers against unapproved avian flu products** (http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/media/advisories-avis/2006/2006_12_e.html)
- **SafeCanada** (the public safety portal for the Government of Canada: http://www.safecanada.ca/link_e.asp?category=4&topic=194)

For more information visit the Public Health Agency of Canada (http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/influenza/avian_e.html), Health Canada (http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dc-ma/avia/index_e.html), and SafeCanada (http://www.safecanada.ca/link_e.asp?category=4&topic=194).

About Vitality!

Vitality! is a publication of Wilson Banwell – Human Solutions™.

For more information on issues presented here feel free to contact your EFAP provider.

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