

Small Business Planning for Pandemics

The CDC checklist, www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/businesschecklist.html, is a great resource for large companies, but may be difficult to read or follow for small businesses. We have collected information that may be useful for small businesses that are trying to prepare for a pandemic. This document may be changed as new information becomes available, so check back for updated versions.

ALL businesses, even small ones, need to prepare for a pandemic. Small businesses have fewer workers and less capital, and are more likely to have difficulty operating under trying times. Spend some time planning now to save your business later.

First things to do:

- Find your important documents (such as business licenses, accounts, etc.) and be sure you have backup copies. Make paper copies of essential documents. If your power goes out for a long period, what papers would you need to continue running your business?
- Providing food (grocery, farmers), water (public utilities), commerce (banks), energy (electricity, gas), transportation (mass transit, repair, cargo transport), healthcare (doctors, nurses, hospitals), public safety (police, fire, EMS,) and communications (phone service) are examples of critical or essential services. Do you sell essential products or provide any essential services?

Communicate with your workers:

- Talk to your workers NOW and work together to plan for an emergency. If your workers are part of a union or labor group, involve them as well.
- Keep a current list of phone numbers for your employees so that you can contact them during an emergency.
- Encourage workers to get an annual influenza vaccination (“flu shot”).
- Help your workers prepare emergency kits for themselves and their families.
- Educate workers on the importance of:
 - Handwashing,
 - Respiratory etiquette (cover coughs and sneezes, using disposable tissues when possible),
 - Healthy diet,
 - Exercise,
 - How to recognize the difference between influenza (“flu”) and a cold (influenza is much more severe, it hits you very suddenly, you have fever and aches),
 - The difference between “seasonal flu” and “pandemic flu” (seasonal flu comes every year, pandemic flu is when the flu strain changes

and people may become much sicker than usual, and some may die).

Reduced number of workers:

You may only have half of your workers during a pandemic. Some will be sick, and some may stay home to take care of sick family members or care for children. Here are some ideas on how you can keep your business open during a pandemic or other emergency.

- Limit some of your services. At a minimum, try to provide essential services during a pandemic or emergency situation.
- Reduce the hours you are open for business.
- Cross-train your employees. Make sure that you don't have only one or two workers that know how to do a critical part of your work. If they became ill, you would have difficulty keeping your business open.
- Recall and retrain retired workers. Keep phone numbers and addresses of workers who have retired. You may need to ask them to help during a pandemic or other emergency.
- Plan on selling, servicing, and making products with fewer workers.
- If you are out sick, will your business continue to operate? Identify workers who can make key decisions in the absence of owners/managers.

Social distancing:

If a pandemic occurs, you may be asked to have your business participate in social distancing. This means that people should stay at least 3 feet apart from each other. Here are some ideas that can help:

- Encourage frequent handwashing.
- Limit face-to-face contact.
 - Try to reduce people standing in lines or crowds.
 - Ask customers to stand further away from workers and each other.
 - Install plexiglass panels between workers and customers.
 - Use telephones to communicate with customers or internal staff.
 - Stop hand shaking.
 - Spread out seating in meetings, or meet via teleconference.
 - Stop sharing of workstations.
 - Avoid unnecessary meetings.
 - Limit the number of people on elevators, and encourage people to use the stairs.
 - Have your business work additional shifts or stagger shifts, with fewer workers per shift, to increase the distance between employees.
 - Have your employees work from home.

Plan ahead:

Keeping your workers healthy is one of your biggest priorities. Sick workers must not come to work, or stay at work, because they can infect your other healthy workers.

- Review your sick leave policies. During a public health emergency, sick workers must not come to work, even if you are short-staffed. Do not allow sick employees to stay at work. You must not punish employees if they are sick during an emergency. Establish clear policies and guidelines now that will help employees understand options and expectations for when they are ill.
- What will your business do if a worker becomes ill while at work? Establish clear policies now.
- Provide soap and hot water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers to your employees. Provide disposable tissues.
- Mass transit (such as crowded subways or buses) may be suspended during a pandemic. Gasoline may become very expensive and/or difficult to get. How will your employees get to work?
- Develop infection control practices, such as decontaminating office surfaces, such as phones, keyboards, etc. daily.

Other things to consider:

- Long distance travel may be temporarily stopped. Try to avoid travel (especially to affected areas) by using teleconferencing or videoconferencing. See if there are local suppliers available for your business.
- Do you have employees with special needs, such as disabled workers or those unable to read/write, etc? How will they be cared for?
- If a pandemic occurs, your suppliers may be cut off. Can you increase your inventory of raw materials?
- How will you communicate with your customers, suppliers, and general public during an emergency? Do you have a website? Use password-protected websites to communicate sensitive information with employees.
- Make sure that you can access TV, radio, and/or the Internet at work to follow developments as they occur.
- How will your business be affected by a pandemic? For example, if mass gatherings are cancelled, would your business be affected? Some businesses may be very busy during a pandemic, such as gas stations, grocery stores, etc.

References:

Financial Services Sector Coordinating Council
 Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy
 Pandemicflu.gov

**Utah Department of Health
 Bureau of Epidemiology
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