

Business Preparedness and Novel Corona Virus, (COVID-19)

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Background:

The current novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, while originating in China, has spread to many other nations, and has potential to be classified as a pandemic, possibly affecting all types of Infrastructure, worldwide. Systemic coordinated efforts by healthcare professionals to contain and prevent the spread of COVID-19 appear to be having some effect in slowing the spread of the virus outside China but it is too early to predict success. "Cracks and seams" in the response to COVID-19 in China have already had significant impact on China's citizen's health, economy, infrastructure and public trust in government. It is important for organizations, especially in critical infrastructure sectors to take measures to minimize impact to their organizations, to protect employees and minimize supply chain disruptions.

What is the Corona Virus?

The Corona Virus is one of many types of virus which affect both animals and humans. Similar in structure to the common "cold" virus the infectivity and lethality of corona viruses vary widely. Both the recent outbreaks of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and MERs (Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome) were corona viruses. Attributes of COVID-19 which may make it more likely to become a Pandemic include; human to human, respiratory droplet and gastrointestinal spread, an asymptomatic infectious period, no current vaccine and anti-

virals are not currently known to be particularly effective. The infectiousness and the mortality rate are still being determined in this case. The ability of persons who are infected but asymptomatic to transmit this virus is creating challenges in slowing transmission.

International air travel from countries where the infection is epidemic is the most likely means for COVID-19 to spread worldwide.

Personal Protective Measures

Despite the first cases of transmission of the virus in the US without a known link to China, or a known virus carrier, the risk of getting COVID-19 in the United States is low at this time. Keeping in perspective that 30,000 people on average die annually from the flu, this may not have any greater effect on the population, with an appropriate public health response.

As with the flu, general measures to protect from viral infection are the most appropriate; hand washing, avoid persons with respiratory illness or fever, get a "flu shot". CDC does not currently recommend wearing a face mask. N-95 masks (respirators) may provide additional protection in case n COVID-19 becomes common in the US. Persons should avoid air travel to China and other nations where the disease has been spreading rapidly.

The Public Health Response - Significant public health measures such as: quarantine, isolation, cancellation of certain international flights, border surveillance and many others are being instituted. Sufficient supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) are still available. A vaccine is being fast-tracked. CDC and other government entities are making information and advice available to the public and updating it regularly. The "Coronavirus COVID-19 Global



Cases by Johns Hopkins CSSE" tracks the spread of the disease, and can be found at:

<https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

Implications for all Businesses and Organizations

In a Pandemic it is extremely important to separate those with severe symptoms from those with mild symptoms or who may have just been exposed. However, if even half of the population with symptoms seek medical care of some type, hospitals and clinics of all types will be overwhelmed. Public health authorities will recommend that certain categories of patients stay at home to avoid overloading the system, cross contamination in order to provide critical services to those in greatest need, (triage). A hospital's ability to "surge" to take care of the additional patient numbers during a Pandemic depends on many factors; space, equipment, staffing, supplies, PPE and many others. Absenteeism of clinical and non-clinical staff for a variety of reasons may be especially vexing. DOD estimates that when absenteeism reaches approximately 40%, (USNORTHCOM) the critical infrastructure sector affected will possibly fail. Pandemic hospitals (dedicated or using buildings of opportunity) of the type being constructed in China may become particularly important. Temporary use of; hotels, cruise ships, tent "hospitals" or other structures would be considered for isolation/ quarantine. Supply chains of some goods from China are already under stress and could affect US supplies.

It is imperative to remain up to date on how this virus will impact the global supply chain and impact each critical infrastructure.

NDRC Recommendations for CI

Of all the Critical Infrastructure (CI) sectors, Healthcare and Public Health is perhaps the most complex, and most reliant on all the other (15) CI sectors; power, water, IT, transportation, finance, communications, etc. Healthcare's ability to persist through disasters of all types and continue to serve the public is essential to society functioning as a whole. Planning is of course of greatest importance prior to any disaster. Coalitions and partnerships likewise are essential for this sector. In general, this is still a developing situation and, should they become necessary, public health authorities will recommend additional measures for the public, (masks, school closures, social distancing).

NDRC members can be useful in sharing information with individual facilities and community partnerships / healthcare coalitions to explore different scenarios and plan and exercise for a "worst case" disaster such as severe pandemic. The following pages provide sample continuity measures to be implemented prior to any type of disease outbreak in the United States. Encouraging companies, especially in the critical infrastructure sector, to prepare their employees and facilities and to develop policies should COVID-19 become a greater threat to their organization.

References

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/types.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>

<https://www.infragardnational.org/resources/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-resources/>



Pandemic Influenza: is flu that causes a global outbreak, or pandemic, of serious illness that spreads easily from person to person. It has the potential to cause a major impact to businesses operations.

The World Health Organization has expressed concern that COVID-19 may have an incubation period of longer than 14 days, during which patients who are asymptomatic may be spreading the disease. This has significant consequences for businesses trying to manage their operations if even a single employee is diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus. Additionally, patients who have recovered from symptoms may still be contagious, and some have relapsed after initial recovery. In some past outbreaks, the flu has come in “waves” so once the first wave has passed, the danger is not necessarily abated. Having a plan to manage these issues is imperative for business continuity.

While the extent of the COVID-19 virus spreading in the United States is not currently known, all businesses and organizations can take steps before an outbreak and communicate these policies to their organization. The following recommendations are general in nature and will need to be tailored to the needs of each organization. Conducting a discussion-based exercise with senior leadership to evaluate what steps could be taken and determine what policies and capabilities should be implemented will provide steps to minimize the impact of this virus. What guidance would you provide to other employees, and what steps can/should be taken by your organization now, and during an incident, to stop the spread of the virus and maintain your organizational capabilities? Some examples:

Develop Human Relations Policies

- Implement a policy requesting staff to stay at home if ill and sending them home if they become ill at work
- Develop a policy to restrict travel to/from affected regions following CDC guidelines
- Can you implement capabilities/policies for your business to operate at an off-site location or from a different site?
- Do you have rules for telecommuting and what you will and will not support?
- Will you pay your staff during the pandemic if they are not working? Does your organization have a line of credit to pay employees if needed?
- Will staff benefits continue?
- Ensure direct deposit is in place for all staff members.
- Confirm staff can be paid - can payroll be run from a remote location?
- Encourage seasonal flu vaccination.
- Consider having professional help possibly through employee assistance providers to assist staff in coping with stress and loss during this time.
- Identify measures to provide support to employees’ families as appropriate.
- Encourage personal preparations measures, such as having at least a two-week supply of food and medicines at home.
- Healthy employees will likely fare better if the disease strikes. Encourage healthy habits, exercise, proper nutrition, sufficient sleep, to help combat the flu.



- Follow CDC's advice on making workplaces safe. They may recommend screening employees and how to do it as well as how to keep facilities sanitized.

Develop Communication Plans:

- Do you have capacity for conducting large scale video or teleconferencing?
- Draft sample messages to staff about a pandemic now, before a pandemic and for each stage during a pandemic.
- Let the staff know you are planning for their safety and business continuity.
- Establish a hot line for providing messages to the staff so that the staff can stay informed.
- Provide a communication channel for staff to get their questions answered.
- Develop capability to transfer phones to staff member's home or cell phones.

Determine Critical Work:

- Prioritize work that must be done for the survival of the business and/or survival of others.
- Determine risk to the business if not critical tasks cannot be supported.
- Identify options for maintaining critical tasks.
- Ask suppliers about their plans to maintain operations and determine if alternative suppliers may be necessary to provide resources, if suppliers are in a high risk/hard hit area.
- Increase inventory of critical supplies if appropriate.

Share Good Hygiene and Social Distancing Measures with all Staff:

- Encourage: washing hands often, using hand sanitizer, following good cough etiquette.
- During the pandemic, clean surfaces: handles, phones, doorknobs, etc. Provide surface sterilization training for custodial staff and encourage use of gloves for their cleaning tasks.
- Consider: restricting shaking hands, restricting face-to-face meeting.
- Consider providing gloves or masks to employees if they must be on site.
- Consider expanding work hours, staggered working hours and restricting cafeteria seating.
- Develop policies to be able to enact these measures.

Determine computing requirements that may be needed to implement these policies:

- Working from home (check with legal staff and human resources about insurance issues)
 - Confirm staff can access needed information and systems from home.
 - Consider additional laptops for key staff.
 - Can employees access your network from personally owned computers?
- Expand VPN access to any employees able to work from home.

