



Staffing Insider

Issue 5

Pandemic Planning
A Human Resources Perspective

For many years Pandemic Planning has been a priority for healthcare facilities and government officials. Since June 2009, when the World Health Organization raised the H1N1 alert from Phase Five to Phase Six, business professionals also began taking note. Pandemic Planning involves a thorough review of all policies, procedures and practices to assess and reduce the potential impact of business interruptions. While many organizations are well on their way to developing and documenting a robust Pandemic Plan, some have not yet focused on the most important element, their staff.

Adopting a few simple best practices can help you focus on leading your people through the upcoming anticipated pandemic.

COMMUNICATE

Early, frequent and thorough communication is essential so that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities during a pandemic. Advanced communication also helps employees feel more secure, enabling them to focus on their work. This allows them to reflect on changes to their normal work routines, ask questions and understand the key aspects of the Plan. Test out your Plan with employees and promote two-way communication to gather feedback and identify areas requiring improvement.

EDUCATE

Your employees need to learn about the H1N1 virus and its prevention in order to protect themselves, their families and your customers. Education about Influenza, symptom recognition, hand-washing practices, customer contact precautions, isolation considerations and workstation hygiene is essential in order to slow the spread of the virus within your workplace. Keep all educational materials and resources visible and up-to-date and make sure all employees know where to access current information and updates.

CROSS-TRAIN

Train and cross-train so that all functions can be performed by more than one “back-up”. Employees must be comfortable with additional tasks and responsibilities. The flu can affect anyone. Ensure cross-training covers a couple of levels up and down the command chain and keep all decision-making documentation accessible and updated, including staff contact lists and delegations of authority.

ENABLE REMOTE WORK

Although telecommuting is not possible for the majority of the workforce, it's important to identify which functions can be performed remotely or externally. Proactively plan on performing some administrative, accounting and coordination tasks remotely. Investigate your organization's technical capacity and restrictions, including remote computer system access and re-routing telephone services. Ensure your Information Technology team is up to the challenge of dealing with data security issues. Enabling remote work functionality ahead of time will ensure continuity throughout the pandemic period.

STAFF REINFORCEMENT

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) states, “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”. Most experts are predicting that the first pandemic wave will come in November with one or two subsequent waves, each lasting six to eight weeks, with three to nine months separating each outbreak. With these staggering numbers in mind, it is important to have a proactive staffing plan in place before the pandemic strikes. Hiring in October and November rather than waiting for the pandemic strike, plus making advanced arrangements with a staffing provider will alleviate last minute scrambling. A staffing expert such as The People Bank, Allen Professional Search, Aimco Staffing Solutions or Placement Group can provide specialized and flexible recruitment solutions based on your needs.



Staffing Insider

Issue 5

Pandemic Planning
A Human Resources Perspective

MONITOR

A successful Pandemic Plan should be able to sustain your business' essential functions for a period of months. Monitor the situation closely and perform course-correction as necessary. Ensure your Pandemic Plan is implemented consistently across all departments and areas and monitor your workforce to make sure they are following all policies and procedures.

APPRECIATE

When the first wave has passed, show appreciation for the fact that you were able to maintain service for your clients throughout a challenging period. Many of your employees will have gone through a difficult time, overcoming both personal and professional demands and perhaps battling illness. Recognize employees who did something extraordinary and reward those who went above and beyond to aid co-workers or clients.

Be prepared for a range of situations. Although the full impact of the anticipated H1N1 outbreak will not be known until it happens, it's your people who must react and adjust to the circumstances to carry you through this challenging period. If you adopt these simple best practices you have a better chance of successfully leading your troops through the crisis.

We will continue to share insider information about the employment and recruitment marketplace in future issues of the *Staffing Insider*. We would encourage you to [subscribe to our electronic newsletter](#) if you are interested in joining the discussion about HR issues and solutions in the upcoming recovery.

This issue of the *Staffing Insider* is a modified reprint of an article published in Complete Purchasing Solutions' national magazine, *Directions*, written by Desirée C. Kerr, Manager of Communications at The People Bank. The Staffing Insider is a regularly published insider's view of human resources issues and staffing industry best practices, trends and success stories. Aimco Staffing Solutions, Allen Professional Search, La Banque de Personnel, Placement Group and The People Bank are all specialty divisions of Design Group Staffing Inc.