



BUSINESS CONTINUITY MANAGEMENT: PANDEMIC FLU OUTBREAK

Pandemic flu outbreaks have the potential to cause a lot of disruption to your business. They differ from seasonal flu outbreaks in that they occur when a new flu virus is discovered in the human population which can spread quickly from person to person.

In 2017, there were 131.2 million working days lost due to sickness in the UK, which is an average of 4.1 days per employee* and these numbers could rise significantly if there was a pandemic flu outbreak.

As a business owner, it is important to keep up to date and informed about the level of threat posed by an outbreak. You can do this by:

- Regularly checking the Public Health England website for updates and additional advice and information.
- Listening to media reports for regular updates.
- Considering alternative work options, such as having meetings online via Skype and working from home.

Take steps to manage the spread of a flu virus on your premises and ensure that there are preventative measures in place to keep the working environment hygienic, healthy and clean.

Take these steps to enable business continuity as normal:

- Recognise the symptoms.
- Inform staff that they don't need to work if they have been infected with the virus.
- Review your business's absence and illness policies.
- Promote good hygiene and respiratory etiquette. E.g. enforce the "catch it, bin it, kill it" campaign, provide tissues, bins and hand sanitiser, ensure soap dispensers are regularly topped up.
- Ensure sufficient cleaning schedules are in place and the right products are being used to clean desks and door handles etc.
- Encourage telephone or video meetings during an outbreak to prevent travelling to other locations and either spreading or picking up the infection.
- As part of your plan, ensure that any staff member job roles or duties that are critical to continuity can be covered in their absence. E.g. job training for additional staff members, access to files and databases during their absence.

Symptoms of flu include:

- A sore throat
- Aching muscles/body
- A sudden fever - temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or above
- Feeling tired or exhausted
- A dry, persistent cough
- A headache
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty sleeping
- Diarrhoea or tummy pain
- Nausea or being sick

When planning ahead for an outbreak, it is important to consider the extent to which your business may be affected and which departments and employees are crucial for continuity.

The effect of a pandemic flu outbreak could be huge and potentially catastrophic on the whole business chain. Once the outbreak is under control, it may be beneficial to review how effective your plan was in response to the outbreak and how it could be improved in the future should one occur again.

Source used: AVIVA, NHS UK

*Statistic from IOSHmagazine - Safety, health and wellbeing in the world of work - <https://www.ioshmagazine.com/article/uk-sickness-absence-rate-reaches-all-time-low>