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Managing during an Influenza Pandemic

Each department has identified essential services through a Business Continuity Plan (BCP) that will assist managers to manage core operations during an all hazards event, such as an influenza pandemic.

This handbook provides an overview of some of the information managers of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador need to know in order to ensure effective management of employees during an influenza pandemic so that the impact on the provision of excellence in public services and programs is minimized. It will be updated regularly and is available at: www.exec.gov.nl.ca/exec/pss/.

As a first step in preparing to manage people during an influenza pandemic, managers should:

- Review the Pandemic Preparedness and Response: Handbook for Employees;
- Access the various websites noted in the handbook to learn about the virus;
- Complete the e-Course, offered at no cost, by the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety; and
- Read any questions and answers that have been prepared by the Public Service Secretariat. These are available online at www.intranet.gov.nl.ca.
Influenza Pandemic – Key Questions & Answers

What is a pandemic?
A pandemic is the world-wide spread of a specific disease to which people have little or no immunity.

What is an influenza pandemic?
An influenza pandemic occurs when a radical change takes place in an influenza virus causing a new strain against which people have little or no immunity.

How is influenza or the flu different from an influenza pandemic?
Human influenza, or the flu, is a respiratory infection caused by the influenza virus. Influenza will circulate every year and causes mild to severe illness in outbreaks. Influenza pandemics occur approximately two or three times per century when a new influenza virus is created to which humans have no immunity.

How is influenza spread?
The influenza virus spreads through droplets that have been coughed or sneezed into the air by someone who has the flu. You can get the flu by breathing in these droplets through your nose or mouth, or by the droplets landing directly on your eyes. You can also contract the virus by shaking hands with infected people or by touching contaminated surfaces then transferring the viruses to your own eyes, nose or mouth.

What are the symptoms of influenza?
Influenza symptoms typically include the rapid onset of fever, headache, chills, cough, muscle aches, fatigue, watery eyes and a sore throat. Vomiting and diarrhea may also occur, especially in children.
Influenza Pandemic – Responsibilities in Our Workplace

Responsibility for responding effectively to the challenges posed by an influenza pandemic is shared among all levels of our organization.

Depending on the nature of the pandemic and the needs of each work site at the time of a pandemic, responsibilities may vary.

General responsibilities for employees, managers and various government departments are outlined in the Pandemic Preparedness and Response: Handbook for Employees.

Managers should review the responsibilities noted in this Handbook and be prepared to carry out their own responsibilities and work with employees to ensure that they understand their responsibilities during an influenza pandemic.
What are my responsibilities as a manager?

1. Monitor and address employee concerns and questions.

2. Distribute pandemic related information to employees.

3. Promote occupational health and safety practices in the workplace.

4. Be knowledgeable about your department’s business continuity plan.

5. Ensure that a human resource contingency plan is in place for your work unit.

6. Know and understand what supports are possible within your work unit to assist employees who have to take leave to recover from influenza or take care of ill family members.

7. Protect an employee’s right to privacy.

8. Monitor the availability of supplies such as hand soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizers.

9. Advise departmental executive of trends, issues and concerns that present in the workplace.
1. Monitor and address employee concerns

During an influenza pandemic, employees may have questions about how it may impact them and their work environment. It will be all the more important to exercise good management practices and address employee concerns in a timely, calm and composed fashion.

Front line managers and supervisors will play an integral role in allaying people’s concerns and managing what may be complex situations.

Answers to frequently asked questions have been prepared by the Public Service Secretariat. They are available at www.intranet.gov.nl.ca.

It will also be important for managers and supervisors to regularly access the latest information available from the Department of Health and Community Services. This will be posted at www.health.gov.nl.ca

Other information is available through the Public Health Agency of Canada, the World Health Organization, Public Safety Canada and the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. The websites associated with these organizations are noted later in this handbook.
2. Distribute information to effectively communicate pandemic related information

It is important that employees stay informed about an influenza pandemic. There are various websites available which contain information that employees may find useful. A listing of some of these websites is provided in this Handbook.

The website of the Department of Health and Community Service (www.health.gov.nl.ca/health) is the official website of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador with respect to information about an influenza pandemic and will highlight the latest information.

Encourage employees to access the websites to learn more about an influenza pandemic. Having informed employees will allay concerns and help you to manage difficult situations when concerns present in the workplace.

You may want to remind staff to check for regular updates and advise them that management will provide updates on work-related matters as they become available.
2. Distribute information to effectively communicate pandemic related information

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) offers a free online e-Course on “How to Stay Healthy and Help Stop an Influenza Pandemic from Spreading.”

This course can be accessed through the following website: www.ccohs.ca/products/courses/pandemic_aware/

The course provides pertinent information about preparing for a pandemic – at work and at home. It will take about 20 minutes to complete. Let employees know about the course and how to access it. You may want to take some time from your schedule to complete the course so that you are able to respond to any questions which may be posed by employees.

The *Clean, Cover and Contain* awareness campaign of the Department of Health and Community Services provides recommendations on preventing the spread of an influenza virus.

Essentially its recommendations are:

- Washing hands frequently with soap and water, for at least 20 seconds, is one of the best preventive measures against influenza.

- Use a tissue or the bend in your arm to cover coughs and sneezes as opposed to the hands which frequently touch other surfaces and people.

- Employees who are ill with influenza-like symptoms should stay at home until s/he is symptom free, feeling well, and able to fully participate in all normal day to day business activities.

Posters regarding the *Clean, Cover, and Contain Campaign* can be downloaded and printed from [http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/](http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/)

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety also provides posters on appropriate hand washing, using hand sanitizers and etiquette. These posters can be downloaded and printed from [www.ccohs.ca](http://www.ccohs.ca). This website also offers information that employees can use for protecting and preparing at home for an influenza pandemic.
Health and Safety Practices

You may also want to hold a staff meeting to ensure everyone is knowledgeable about how to protect themselves and help prevent the spread of the virus. (A sample agenda for a staff meeting is provided later in this Handbook).

The Handbook for Employees provides information on employee responsibilities and information about pandemic influenza and other workplace-related information. You may want to read the handbook prior to circulating it to employees and hosting a question and answer meeting.

During flu season, employees may also want to think about other everyday activities that can be adjusted to help protect themselves, such as avoiding handshaking, not sharing pens and holding meetings in larger rooms so that people are not crowded together.

During your staff meeting explore with employees the concept of social distancing - reducing potential infection through measures such as avoiding unnecessary face to face meetings, large gatherings and unnecessary physical contact, for example handshakes, and staying a safe distance away from others.
Health and Safety Practices

Using Hand Sanitizers

The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends the use of hand sanitizers only as a supplement to hand washing, not as a replacement for hand washing.

The Department of Transportation and Works has started to install hand sanitizer dispensers in government-operated buildings. These will be located next to areas such as cafeterias and entrances.

In some cases, a department may also provide hand sanitizer pumps at certain work stations where client or employee traffic is greater.

Employees may also choose to purchase hand sanitizers for their own use.

Hand sanitizers should have no fragrance added and to be effective, they must have at least 60% alcohol content.

Consider the work activities of employees within your area of responsibility and determine if hand sanitizer pumps should be placed at various workstations or provided to employees.

For those areas that are shared among employees or where employees provide services to clients, the department may want to purchase hand sanitizer pumps in addition to the dispensers provided by the Department of Transportation and Works.

Remember though, using a hand sanitizer is not a replacement for frequent and thorough hand washing with soap and water.

October 27, 2009
Health and Safety Practices

Cleaning Surface Areas

Influenza may be spread from droplets that are picked up from surface areas such as computer keyboards, door knobs, counter tops, desks, pens, tables, et cetera. Once touched, the employee may touch her/his eyes, mouth or nose – thus transferring the virus.

Some influenza viruses can live outside the body on hard surfaces, such as stainless steel and plastic, for up to forty-eight hours and on soft surfaces, such as cloth, paper, and tissues for less than 8-12 hours.

It is important to ensure that surface areas are cleaned.

During an influenza pandemic, the cleaning regime for surface areas and washrooms may be upgraded. The Department of Transportation and Works are liaising with the Department of Health and Community Services about best practices and appropriate cleaning protocols.

Know the appropriate cleaning protocols. This will help you to monitor cleaning within your workplace and will also assist you to answer questions and allay employee concerns.
Health and Safety Practices

Cleaning Surface Areas in Shared Work Spaces

Departments may make available disinfectant wipes for employees to use when sharing work spaces or equipment, or for those areas with high client traffic.

Review the nature of the work that your unit performs. If the work involves shared space or counter services to clients then you may want to consider ordering wipes so that employees can use these periodically.

You may need to explain to employees that during an influenza pandemic, cleaning will be everyone’s responsibility and that while the Department of Transportation and Works will step up its cleaning regime, there will be times when employees may want to take it upon themselves to wipe down areas where they regularly work.

Employees may also choose to purchase disinfectant wipes for their own use.
Health and Safety Practices

Containing the Virus

If employees are ill with influenza-like symptoms they should stay at home until they are symptom free, are feeling well, and are able to participate in all normal day to day business activities.

Consider meeting with staff and discussing the importance of staying home when employees are experiencing flu-like symptoms. At this staff meeting you may want to express to employees:

- Your expectations with respect to containment of an influenza virus or potential influenza virus;

- The impact decisions to come into the workplace may have on co-workers; and

- The options that may be available to employees with respect to accessing leave and flexible work arrangements. Leave and Flexible Work Arrangement Policies can be accessed at: www.exec.gov.nl.ca/exec/pss/working_with_us/.

Requirements for medical documentation will be required as per human resource policies. This situation will be monitored during the influenza season and you will be informed if any change to this requirement occurs.
**Health and Safety Practices**

Employees who are experiencing flu-like symptoms in the workplace

Some employees with minor symptoms may be unsure whether or not they have a cold or something more serious. They may easily be able to work in an office on a piece of work without any contact with others and use hand sanitizer and other appropriate preventive methods. In such cases, an employee may make a choice to come to work.

There may be cases, however, when an employee is experiencing severe flu-like symptoms but because of a variety of reasons (for example, no sick leave, work commitments, work ethic) may decide to come to work. In such cases, a manager may need to discuss with the employee the reasonableness of being at work.

If a person is too ill to perform the functions of her/his position, management can request that an employee return home on sick leave.

If an employee refuses to go home on sick leave, management can ask the employee to obtain a note from a physician indicating that s/he is well enough to be at work.

Your Human Resources Division is positioned to assist you with making decisions on such issues and you should consult with the Director of Human Resources for your Department prior to taking action if an employee refuses to leave the workplace.
Health and Safety Practices

Personal Protective Equipment

The Department of Health and Community Services has advised that, with the exception of some specialized positions in health care, there is no need for employees in the public sector to use any specialized personal protective equipment such as masks.

During an influenza pandemic, this situation will be monitored and assessed on a regular basis and if personal protective equipment needs are identified, you will be notified.
4. **Be knowledgeable about your department’s Business Continuity Plan**

Each department has a Business Continuity Plan which is a key element in enabling the department to respond effectively when there is a threat of an All Hazards Event or when an All Hazards Event has occurred.

The Business Continuity Plan is a collection of procedures and information developed, compiled and maintained in readiness for use in the event of an emergency or disaster.

The Business Continuity Plan must be ready for immediate partial or full implementation if an All Hazards Event is declared.

Managers may want to consider how regional offices and/or regional service delivery will be maintained if these are not addressed in the Business Continuity Plan.

Managers may also want to review the Business Continuity Plan on a periodic, but regular basis, to ensure that it is current. Specifically:

- That the correct services have been identified as essential and that the appropriate level of service has been defined;

- That employees who are assigned roles are still current employees of the department and are available to fulfill the roles that are assigned; and

- That employees have been informed of their assignments.
Business Continuity Plan

An influenza pandemic will likely have only minimal impact on the organization in the early stages; however the impact may increase quickly or may grow gradually along a continuum.

Even at early stages though, a department may experience some challenges related to the virus. It is therefore essential that you know what the identified essential services of your department are and how you and the employees reporting to you may be impacted.

It is also important that you inform employees about the existence of the plan and answer any questions that an employee may have.
The Business Continuity Plan for your department outlines the essential services of the department and the expectations of service and program delivery.

Essential services within a Business Continuity Plan are those services that when compromised in terms of availability or integrity, could result in injury to the health, safety, security, or economic well being of Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans or to the efficient functioning of the province.

There are three categories of essential services:

- **Critical services** must be provided immediately or the loss of life, infrastructure destruction, loss of confidence in the government or significant loss of revenue will result. These services normally require continuity or restoration in less than one day following an interruption. Examples of critical services are child abuse investigations, serious fire investigations, policing, and communications.

- **Vital services** must be provided in less than one week or loss of life, infrastructure destruction, loss of confidence in the government of the province, or significant loss of revenue or disproportionate recovery costs will result. Examples of vital services are income support, animal disease surveillance, and the support enforcement program.

- **Necessary services** must be recovered in one month or considerable loss, further destruction or disproportionate recovery costs will result. Examples of necessary services are tax administration, medical and dental claims processing, and permits for routine fire and life safety.
5. Ensure that a human resource contingency plan is in place for your work unit

The precise impact of an influenza pandemic on the employees of an organization cannot be anticipated. However, there is much that a department can do to be prepared for a potential event.

A Human Resource Contingency Plan (HR) is separate, but flows from the Business Continuity Plan. Preparing a HR Contingency Plan will enable your work unit to prepare employees for an influenza pandemic and understand human resource needs and solutions.

This HR contingency plan is a critical element in maintaining the delivery of essential government departments during an influenza pandemic.

Essentially, the HR contingency plan is a department-developed plan which outlines:

- The services and programs that are to be continued should an all hazards event occur;
- The number of employees that are essential to provide the services and programs;
- The knowledge, skills and abilities of employees who provide the services;
- A plan to replace or backfill employees in the event that those providing the services are unable to do so; and
- The plan to orient and train replacement personnel in the event that employees have to be redeployed from other departments.

Information from each work unit is essential in building a departmental HR Contingency Plan.
HR Contingency Planning – Some Considerations

Departments may need to seek special licensing agreements with professional associations where necessary to enable and/or expedite temporary licensing provisions for retirees or other professionals with lapsed licenses.

It may be necessary to re-deploy staff during an influenza pandemic to ensure the maintenance of essential, vital and necessary services of government.

A HR Contingency Plan will assist in facilitating the effective, timely and flexible redeployment of employee(s). You may therefore be asked to:

- Identify the skills, abilities, and licenses required to perform the services within your work unit, and
- Identify employees other than the incumbents who hold the required skills, abilities and licenses.

Reassignment would likely first happen at the departmental level.

Where departments are experiencing difficulty staffing essential services, reassignments will be coordinated by the Public Service Secretariat.
6. Supports for Employees

During an influenza pandemic, all managers need to be sensitive to employee needs. Efforts will be made to assist employees who, because of the virus, become ill or have to take care of sick family members.

Employees with a compromised immune system or with a family member living with them who have a compromised immune system may need to take extra precautions.

If employees who become ill due to influenza and have no sick leave available to them, they can access any annual, paid or time in lieu of overtime that they have accumulated. Some employees may opt to proceed on unpaid leave while others may want to discuss other options with you such as borrowing from next year’s leave bank.

Employees are expected to accumulate sufficient leave in their leave banks to cover extended periods of illness, however, in the case of new employees or due to exceptional past circumstances, such as a previous incident of extended sick leave, this may not be the case. When such circumstances exist you may want to consider requesting that the person be permitted to avail of leave from the next year’s allocation.

In such circumstances, you may want to consult with your HR Division to determine whether or not a request should be forwarded to the Public Service Secretariat.
6. Supports for Employees

In some cases, the nature of the work may permit an employee to avail of a flexible work arrangement on a temporary basis.

Information on Flexible Work Arrangements can be found at:

www.exec.gov.nl.ca/exec/pss/working_with_us/flex_work.html.

The Employee Assistance Program of the Public Service Commission will also be available to you and employees. For further information on the services available through this program, see:

www.psc.gov.nl.ca/psc/eap
7. Protect an employee’s right to privacy

It is important that an employee’s right to privacy is respected in our workplaces.

When an employee, or a family member of an employee, becomes ill with influenza and shares this information with you as her/his manager, you can only share this information with your own manager. This is confidential information that belongs to that individual and not to every employee.

There may be cases when an employee comes to you regarding concerns that s/he has about a co-worker who may have come to work exhibiting flu-like symptoms. It is your responsibility as a manager to follow up on these concerns and to let the employee know once you have done so. However, you should not discuss with the concerned employee, the particulars of any discussion that you have had with the employee who is experiencing flu-like symptoms.

Employees may also alert you to problems that another employee may be having at home with respect to the influenza pandemic. You should be open to hearing these concerns and can follow up with the employee regarding supports that we, as an employer, can provide that may assist the employee at home or at work. Again though, any discussion that you have with an employee cannot be shared with her/his co-workers.
8. In partnership with the Department of Transportation and Works, monitor the availability of supplies such as hand soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizers

During an influenza pandemic it is important that everyone work together to monitor the availability of supplies including:

- Hand soap
- Paper towels
- Hand sanitizers
Providing Client Services

Many of the services and programs that government employees provide are important to the residents of our province. It is therefore important that, during an influenza pandemic, the provision of the services and programs that are offered by departments continue to the best of our ability.

Employees will likely have a number of questions regarding the provision of services to clients, especially those clients who are presenting with flu-like symptoms. Some of these questions and the corresponding answers follow.

**Will government offices be closed if a case of pandemic influenza is confirmed in the workplace?**

Government offices will not be closed if a case of pandemic influenza is confirmed in the workplace. We will continue to promote basic infection control processes, such as frequent hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, and asking those who feel ill to stay at home.

**Will services to the public be discontinued during an influenza pandemic?**

We will continue to provide services to our clients. The situation will be monitored on an ongoing basis during an influenza pandemic and any changes to service levels will be communicated to employees and the community at large.
Providing Client Services

What do I do if a client presents with flu-like symptoms?

- During flu season we often come into contact with others who are experiencing flu-like symptoms.
- Take the standard precautionary measures to reduce your risk, such as:
  - Thoroughly and frequently wash your hands with soap and water;
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth as germs can spread that way; and
  - Avoid close contact with others, especially those who are sick – keep as much distance between you and other person as possible. Once you finish providing services to the individual, ensure that you either wash your hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitizer.
  - An influenza pandemic may not be any different that any other types of influenza where the incubation period if between two and seven days. Thus preventive measures should occur in dealing with others – family, friends, co-workers and clients – regardless of whether or not they exhibit flu-like symptoms.

If employees have concerns about serving clients, what do I do?

It is important that employee concerns be addressed, and that specific issues be brought to you, as the manager. Employees may have ideas about other ways to provide services that you may want to explore. You should also discuss, with employees, specific preventive measures that can be practiced in business dealings with clients.
Human Resource Policies

During the initial stages of an influenza pandemic we will be operating on a business-as-usual basis. This situation will be monitored on an ongoing basis and you will be notified if changes are approved.

You should consult the Collective Agreements specific to your work unit and government’s human resource policies which are available at:

www.exec.gov.nl.ca/exec/pss/working_with_us/
What websites are of value to me?

Official communications regarding an influenza pandemic will be available on the website of the Department of Health and Community Services (www.health.gov.nl.ca/health)

Other information on an influenza pandemic is available from the following organizations:
• Public Health Agency of Canada (www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)
• World Health Organization (www.who.int)
• Public Safety Canada (www.publicsafety.gc.ca)
• Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (www.ccohs.ca)

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety offers an e-Course on “How to Stay Healthy and Help Stop an Influenza Pandemic from Spreading.” You can access the e-Course free-of-charge through www.ccohs.ca/products/courses/pandemic_aware/

Information specific to employees of government departments, such as answers to frequently asked questions will be posted on the Public Service Network (PSN) at www.intranet.gov.nl.ca

Information on human resource policies will be posted to the website of the Public Service Secretariat (www.exec.gov.nl.ca/exec/pss and www.exec.gov.nl.ca/exec/pss/working_with_us/policies.html)

Information on employee assistance services available from the Public Service Commission is available at www.psc.gov.nl.ca/psc/eap
Holding Staff Meetings

During an influenza pandemic you will want to hold regular staff meetings with employees so that you are delivering
  • Important information to employees about current issues
  • Maintaining an open line of communications; and
  • Providing consistent messages to staff.

Initial Staff Meeting
Influenza Pandemic

Prior to the meeting you may want to suggest that employees access and complete the e-Course on How to Stay Healthy and Help Stop an Influenza Pandemic from Spreading available at www.ccohs.ca/products/courses/pandemic_aware/

Agenda

1. **Review the Employee Handbook**
   Have extra copies of the Employee Handbook with you to circulate if necessary.

2. **Discuss the e-Course**
   (Complete the course yourself prior to the meeting. It will take about 15 to 20 minutes.)
   
   You may want to specifically mention 3 or 4 points that may be pertinent to your workplace.
Holding Staff Meetings

Agenda (continued)

3. Round table discussion on hygiene etiquette
   Discuss:
   - Hand washing
   - Using hand sanitizers
   - Etiquette for coughing and sneezing
   - Staying at home when ill

   You can refer to the information available in the Handbook for Employees

4. Concerns and Questions
   Offer employees an opportunity to express any concerns that they may have or ask questions.

   A copy of frequently asked questions and answers are available at www.intranet.gov.nl.ca. You can take these with you, and ensure that staff know where to access this information, or have copies to circulate.

   Information specific to the influenza itself can be found on the website of the Department of Health and Community Services www.health.gov.nl.ca

5. Establish time for next meeting
   During an influenza pandemic it will be important to keep the lines of communication open. You may want to establish a regular meeting time to provide updates and listen to any concerns that staff may have.
Human Resource Contact information

Assistance can be made available through your human resources division. You may want to contact the Director of Human Resources responsible for your department to discuss any questions or appropriate actions.

Mr. John Hicks
(729-1393)
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Executive Council
Office of the Chief Information Officer
Finance
Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs
Public Service Commission

Ms. Cindy Hussey
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Ms. Karen Bartlett
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Justice
Human Resource Contact information

Ms. Sandra Wills
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E-mail: sandrawills@gov.nl.ca

- Environment and Conservation
- Tourism, Culture and Recreation
- Innovation Trade and Rural Development
- Mines and Energy
- Forestry
- Fisheries and Aquaculture

Ms. Wanda Penney
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- Child Youth and Family Services

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- Health and Community Services
- Human Resources Labour and Employment
- Municipal Affairs
- Government Services
- Department of Education
- Fire and Emergency Services Newfoundland
- Labour Relations Agency
- Government Purchasing Agency
Public Service Secretariat Contact Information

Ms. Elizabeth Horwood - All Hazards HR Planning
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Ms. Carolyn Daley – Human Resource Strategist
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Definitions

All Hazards Event
An emergency, disaster, or major disruption.

Good Neighbour Policy
A framework that will assist unions and the employer to work in partnership in the event of an emergency to deal with human resources issues such as assistance from volunteers, establishing alternate work schedules, and work of the bargaining unit.

Social Distancing
Reducing potential infection through measures such as avoiding unnecessary face to face meetings, large gatherings and unnecessary physical contact, for example handshakes, sharing of pens and other equipment, and staying a safe distance away from others.