

# Pandemic Flu Preparedness Kit for Businesses

Las Vegas Chamber  
of Commerce

# Review Sick Leave Policy and Standards

If one of your employees gets sick, all of your employees and their families are at risk. Whether a pandemic outbreak or a normal influenza season, your sick leave policy should be designed not just to give your employees the opportunity to focus on their health; it should also protect your business from the spread of disease.

## Make Sure Sick Employees Stay Home

Make sure your employees understand that it is their responsibility to not come to work sick. Many employees who are sick come to work to either toughen it out or they are concerned about using up all of their allotted sick leave. Communicate to your employees that it is their duty to stay home when sick. Provide a list of symptoms to your employees to help them evaluate their health. And make sure you enforce your policy.

## Consider an Alternative Policy for High-risk Occasions

You may want to establish an alternative sick leave policy to implement when there is a higher risk of the spread of illness. Consider a policy that mandates that employees with symptoms or whose family members have symptoms must stay at home.

## Extend Sick Leave and Pay During High-risk Occasions

Protecting your company from high absenteeism is crucial to the operation of your business. Extending sick leave or pay during high-risk periods may save your company money in the long run. An employee is more likely to abide by the sick leave policy if they are not concerned about the possible financial consequences of missing work. By preventing one sick employee from coming to work, you may successfully keep other employees from getting sick, thus preventing high absenteeism at your business.

# Keep Your Workplace Healthy

Establish policies to promote a healthy workplace. A simple common-sense approach can cut down on absenteeism and prevent illnesses from being spread throughout your business.

## Make Hand Washing Mandatory

The best way to decrease the spread of harmful bacteria around the office is to wash your hands. Studies show most people do not wash their hands properly or at all. Proper hand washing includes washing with soap and water for a full 30 seconds, as well as fully drying your hands. Design hand washing signs and make them a part of your office bathrooms' decor.

## Keep Workspaces Clean

Believe it or not, the average desk has 400 times more germs than a toilet seat! Cleaning your office equipment including phones, keyboards, computer mice, door handles, desk tops and copiers can help you reduce the risk of your employees getting sick. Implement a daily cleaning schedule. Make sure that you provide your employees with cleaning wipes to sanitize equipment such as telephones that have multiple users. One common way to develop a sickness is to transfer the harmful bacteria from the hands to the mouth. Discouraging your employees from snacking at their desks is a great way to cut down on the possibility of getting sick.

## Set Standards with Your Cleaning crew

Establish cleaning standards and expectations with your cleaning crew. Ensure common places such as restrooms, kitchens and break rooms are thoroughly cleaned including doorknobs with appropriate cleaning products. Remember bacteria are commonly passed through hand contact.

## Stock Items to Keep Workplace Clean and Healthy

Make sure that you have supplies readily available to help your employees stay healthy and cut down on the spread of germs. These items should include alcohol-based hand cleaners, tissues, soap in bathrooms and kitchens, clean towels, and masks if your employees will likely deal with customers who are ill.

# Prepare for High Absenteeism and a Smaller Staff

If the swine flu outbreak becomes a full-scale pandemic, estimates are that 20 percent of working adults may become ill during a community outbreak. Up to 40 percent of the workforce may be absent at any one time due to their own illness, to care for a sick family member or children not in school, or out of fear of infection. Planning for high, long-term absenteeism can help your company continue to function.

## Identify Key Business Functions

Identify the key functions of your company and take the necessary steps to ensure the core elements of your business can continue to operate. Consider both the functions that you do for your customers, such as fulfilling orders, as well as key functions that are necessary for your company to operate smoothly, such as handling payroll. Have employees who perform these duties document step-by-step how these essential functions are performed.

## Cross-Train Your Employees

Minimize interruptions to your business by cross-training your employees to handle multiple responsibilities. Make sure that you have at least one back-up employee for every key job function. Instructions and procedures for key job functions should be documented and easily accessed. Also, you should have a comprehensive list of vendors and customers so that you can communicate any changes in operations with them.

## Facilitate Off-Site Work

Not all absenteeism will be due to illness. It may be possible for some of your employees to work from home and maintain their work responsibilities. Take steps now to facilitate off-site work, such as purchasing necessary equipment and software. Set standards for working from home. Make sure that your employees are covered for off-site work on your insurance policies.

# Develop Business Contingency Plans Now

## Create a Disaster Preparedness Plan

Establish a plan of action for your office. Do you know how to reach your employees in case of an emergency? Do you know how to contact your key vendors or customers? Creating a contingency plan can save your business from any type of disruption to your operations. The Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce's *Open for Business*<sup>sm</sup> guide has step-by-step instructions to help you create a plan for your company. You can download this free guide at [www.lvchamber.com/programs/open](http://www.lvchamber.com/programs/open).

## Protect Key Business Functions

Make sure that your key business functions can operate. Consider alternative sources for products and services. Know how to reach your customers to communicate any changes to your business operations. If your company performs an important community function such as telecommunications or healthcare, your services may be in greater demand. Take steps to ensure that your company is able to keep important systems functioning.

## Prepare for Market Changes

A pandemic flu outbreak may create changes in consumer spending habits and could reduce the number of visitors to Las Vegas. These changes may affect your bottom line. Consider establishing an alternative work schedule that reduces your overhead but also allows you to maintain your current employees.

## Prepare for Changes to Suppliers and Vendors

Your business might be fine, but the outbreak may be affecting your vendors, making it difficult for you to get supplies or fill customer orders. Your vendors may be short-staffed or they may be having difficulty shipping supplies to you, particularly if they are shipping from a foreign country. Consider alternative sources for your supplies and orders. Work with your vendors to see if they can offer alternatives to you. Communicate with your customers so they understand the situation. They may be willing to wait for the order, or they may prefer to work with you to find an alternative product.