



Business Continuity Planning for a pandemic outbreak

Seven steps for pandemic preparedness

1 Building corporate support and commitment

The primary key to the success of any initiative of this significance is corporate support and commitment. Corporate leaders, through their actions, communications, priority setting and direction, must instill the importance of pandemic influenza business continuity planning throughout the corporation. This may require some direct communication and training/education on the subject matter. The very first step in the planning process is to establish a Corporate Steering Committee or person to oversee, support and/or direct the process. The steering committee should establish a "terms of reference" with timelines.

2 Identifying critical services/functions

The objective of the Business Continuity planning process is to determine how an organization will maintain critical services/functions in the event of significant staff absenteeism.

Critical service/function is defined as follows:

- A service/function that when not delivered creates an impact on the health and safety of individuals
- A service/function that may lead to the failure of a business unit if activities are not performed in a specified time period

Also, depending on the nature of the service and/or function, the impact may be immediate or may occur over a certain time period.

3 Identifying regulatory requirements and service level agreements

In some organizations there are also critical services/functions that must be performed to meet regulatory requirements and/or fulfill the service level agreements with third parties. In order to perform these types of services/functions in case of a pandemic outbreak, it is important to review requirements from legal and regulatory point of view and if there is legal/regulatory boundaries to consider them including into the Action Plan.

4 Identifying required skill sets and staff allocation

A critical step in the Business Continuity planning process is to identify the number of staff and necessary skills required to perform and maintain the essential services/ functions. This information will be vital when it becomes necessary to reallocate staff resources within the business unit or across the Corporation.

The following steps may help:

- Identify the number of staff (by classification) required to maintain the critical services/functions,
- Identify any special requirements necessary to perform the critical services/functions (for example, license to operate heavy machinery or access authorization for critical building or IT infrastructure).

5 Preparing the Action Plan

Preparing an Action Plan for maintaining critical services/functions to ensure that all issues have been addressed such as the decision-making process/authority for implementing service reduction. This plan details how each critical service/function is maintained, reduced, modified and/or eliminated, who has decision making authority, what solutions will be put in place, any necessary actions to follow and any communication strategy.

An action plan for each critical service/function should be documented during the planning process. The action plan should include details about:

- The critical service/function,
- Key emergency staff (i.e., the individual(s) responsible for implementing the action plan),
- Details of the activation procedure,
- Identification of corporate and community impact issues,
- Regulatory requirements or service level agreements,
- Reallocation potentials of staff from other service/activity areas,
- Communication strategy to staff, business partners and customers/community,
- Staff absenteeism monitoring activities,
- Reporting requirements to decision makers,
- Decision making process during a pandemic outbreak,
- Resource needs including a listing of contact information for internal and external stakeholders.

6 Implementation and Documentation

The documentation of decisions and actions for each essential service/function is the final step in drafting a Business Continuity Plan. This step should be taken once you have:

- Identified critical services/functions,
- Identified any relevant issues/implications that may arise when the level of service/function is modified,
- Identified action plans for critical services/functions.

7 Reviewing, Testing and Update

Once the Business Continuity Plan is complete, you need to circulate the plan for information and training purposes within your organization. As with any other plans, the Business Continuity Plan will require at the least, an annual review for any necessary revisions. Conducting an emergency exercise to test the plan will help your staff understand the Business Continuity Plan, how and when it's activated, who is responsible for what, and how it fits with your corporate strategy to deal with a pandemic outbreak.