

Tool: Model Pandemic Influenza Policy

Although not officially a pandemic, the miserable 2018 flu season is a vivid reminder of the importance of preparing so that your lab responds effectively if and when the next pandemic does hit. The starting point is a pandemic policy like the one below. Drawing on actual examples used by government agencies and private companies, the Model Policy can be adapted for use by your own lab.

XYZ LABORATORIES PANDEMIC INFLUENZA POLICY

1. PURPOSE

This Policy, which is Part of XYZ Laboratory's ("LAB") emergency-preparedness and business continuity plan, is designed to set broad parameters for safeguarding employees' health and well-being during a flu pandemic while ensuring our ability to maintain essential operations and continue providing essential services to our customers.

2. DEFINITION OF PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

According to the federal Centers for Disease Control, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and other organizations, influenza or flu is caused by a variety of influenza A viruses that can cause at least three different diseases:

1. Avian flu viruses that mostly affect birds and chickens or other poultry;
2. Pandemic influenza that can occur when mutating flu viruses become transmissible to humans, who generally lack any natural immunity to fight off the viruses' adverse health effects; and
3. Seasonal flu.

Of the three, pandemic influenza poses the most serious global threats to public health, the economy and LAB operations.

3. ESSENTIAL PERSONNEL

LAB expects that during a pandemic, only the employees it has identified and designated as essential personnel will be available for work. LAB acknowledges, however, that even essential personnel might become ill and unavailable to work or not be able to reach our worksite because of conditions beyond their own or LAB's control. Consequently, LAB and its industry partners will

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make back-up arrangements so that designated personnel in locations outside our respective areas are trained and equipped to fulfill the duties of unavailable essential employees. LAB has also equipped essential personnel with all resources necessary to work remotely during emergencies.

4. REMOTE WORK LOCATIONS

During an influenza pandemic, local, state, or federal authorities might prohibit or severely curtail access to and use of public services and public transportation; close or prevent access to buildings or public highways; isolate or quarantine buildings' occupants; and prevent inter- or intrastate delivery of goods and services. LAB cannot predict and has no control over such actions and acknowledges its legal duty to comply with outside authorities' directives. It is, however, prepared to continue key "bare bones" operations from remote work locations, including essential employees' home offices. LAB has installed at all remote work locations all the equipment necessary for off-site telecommuting operations and designated a secure web site through which essential personnel can communicate with each other and outside authorities.

5. INFECTION CONTROL

LAB takes steps to minimize exposure to and spread of infection in the workplace and recommends measures that employees can take to protect themselves outside the workplace and encourages all workers to discuss their specific needs with a family physician or other appropriate health or wellness professional.

6. EMPLOYEE OBLIGATIONS

LAB expects employees who contract the flu or have been exposed to infected family members or others to stay home and seek medical attention as necessary and appropriate. It expects such workers to notify LAB as soon as possible of exposure or illness. At LAB's discretion or the direction of outside authorities, it can require the isolation and quarantine of any infected employees who come to work despite exposure or need for medical attention.

7. VACCINATION

LAB requires all essential personnel to maintain up-to-date vaccinations and to obtain annual LAB-paid flu shots, if available and not medically contraindicated. LAB requires essential personnel to certify that they have obtained the necessary inoculations and to maintain a copy of that certification, which must be provided at LAB's request.

8. EMPLOYEE TRAINING

All employees are at risk of exposure to flu viruses, both in and outside the workplace; therefore, LAB requires all employees to attend initial or refresher training annually in September to become informed about what to do when a flu outbreak occurs covering such issues as availability of flu shots, symptoms and health effects of influenza, treatment, and sources to contact for appropriate medical care, steps to take if exposure is suspected; LAB representatives to whom to report known or suspected exposures, and procedures for reporting

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exposure to co-workers, family members, friends, or others who are ill with flu; proper use of LAB-provided personal-protection equipment; proper hygiene in the workplace and at home; and communications. Training includes role-plays based on scenarios developed to test employees' understanding of our planned emergency response. Supervisors are responsible for recording and maintaining documentation on every employee's participation in required training.

9. PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

LAB maintains on site adequate supplies of recommended personal-protection equipment, such as face masks, eye protection, rubber gloves, and anti-bacterial hand gels and wipes, which workers may be required to use. All employees are advised to speak with their personal physician about types and proper use of personal-protection equipment in the home.

10. FACILITIES MAINTENANCE

LAB's facility manager regularly inspects the workplace for signs of heating, air conditioning, or other equipment in need of replacement or repair and coordinates closely with our cleaning and waste-removal contractors to maintain our physical plant in top condition. LAB approves the installation or use wherever possible of improved equipment or cleaning methods to guard against the spread of infection in the workplace.

11. EMPLOYEE LEAVE AND PAY

In the event of pandemic influenza, LAB grants all nonessential personnel immediate administrative leave. It pays workers on administrative leave a reduced salary, and continues such reduced salary for one-week periods up to a maximum of six weeks. LAB monitors emergency conditions daily to determine how long administrative leave must continue and, following consultation with outside authorities, advises employees when to expect to return to work.

LAB places on family and medical leave any workers who fall ill with flu or must be absent from work to care for an infected family member. Such employees must notify LAB as soon as possible of need for family and medical leave. Employees may use accrued paid annual and sick leave in lieu of unpaid family and medical leave. Employees must take unpaid family and medical leave once all accrued paid leave is used. All employees are also required to certify that they have received, read, and fully understand our family and medical leave policy and its use in a flu outbreak.

12. BUSINESS TRAVEL

All reasonable efforts will be made to eliminate the need for travel by taking advantage of technology. Generally, in the event of an influenza pandemic, travel on LAB's behalf will be immediately suspended and limited to a select group of essential personnel who have obtained required travel authorizations from LAB and any necessary outside authorities. Essential personnel or other employees traveling anywhere on LAB's behalf and exposed to avian flu or pandemic influenza are eligible for workers' compensation.

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13. EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

Employees must notify their immediate supervisor and HR of any change in emergency contact information within two weeks of a change. When providing such information, employees, especially those who have children or care for elderly relatives, should identify individuals on whom they can depend if the employees themselves become sick at work and must be isolated and quarantined. HR is directed to verify electronically employees' emergency contact information twice a year, in January and July. Supervisors are required to maintain in the workplace and at home an up-to-date emergency-contact list for their unit or department.

14. SPECIAL NEEDS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

LAB is required by law to notify first-responders about employees with medical conditions that could be compromised because of an influenza pandemic. Such employees are urged to confidentially self-identify to HR so that we are aware of and can prepare for you to receive any special medical expertise you might require if you become severely ill on the job. HR maintains the confidentiality of any information you provide, making it available solely on a need-to-know basis and only when needed by emergency responders.

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