



DEVELOPING AN INFECTIOUS DISEASE RESPONSE PLAN



All employers should be ready to implement strategies to protect their workforce from COVID-19 and other infectious diseases while ensuring continuity of operations. An infectious disease outbreak strikes directly at your most valuable asset – your employees. All sick employees should stay home and away from the workplace. Respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene should be encouraged and routine cleaning of commonly touched surfaces should be performed regularly. Review your human resources policies and practices to make sure they are consistent with public health recommendations and state and federal workplace laws. Then consider the following questions.

Can your company operate with 25% or greater absenteeism?

Your organization may have to deal with a minimum of 25% absenteeism during an infectious disease response. This isn't staff that are working from home, but rather staff that are not able to perform duties, even remotely. Can your organization handle 25% absenteeism? What about 40%?

If illness causes high absenteeism, are employees cross-trained and able to perform multiple duties?

Identify critical job roles and functions: those functions that need to take place under all circumstances. Consider cross-training personnel to perform these essential functions. Plan out how you will conduct business operations with less staff or interruptions in business functions. Explore options for flexible work hours (staggered shifts) or work sites (work from home or telecommuting). This will allow physical distance among employees. What infrastructure will you need to support the shift to an at-home workforce?

What procedures do you have in place to decontaminate the facility and its heating, ventilation, air-conditioning systems, electronic equipment and soft materials (blankets, curtains, etc.)?

Talk to your facilities manager or look at your vendor contracts to determine how cleaning can be augmented to meet the recommendations given by federal and local officials.

What assurances do you need to provide to the facility staff members, so they feel safe at work?

Plan communication strategies with staff and business partners to share information and updates, and to reduce fear and misinformation. Share and discuss the outbreak response plan with your employees. Allow them to provide feedback and address any gaps in the plan.

Have you also thought about sick leave policies for staff, contractors and/or temporary workers?

Consider whether your employees can stay home without fear of repercussions. Some may not have available sick time, and a sick employee who feels that they cannot stay home can infect a large group of employees.

Do the vendors and suppliers you rely on have an appropriate preparedness plan? Will they continue to provide services during an outbreak?

Your organization is only as strong as its weakest link. Be sure to reach out to vendors and contractors to ensure that the services and products you need to fulfill your company's mission will continue in the face of an outbreak. Consider alternative vendors and suppliers; and have contracts in place to ensure continuity.

Is there a trained and representative crisis management team that includes on-call staff, and do those team members know what is expected of them?

Crisis management teams can look different in each organization, but be sure it is representative of the departments in your organization, including Human Resources, Finance, Information Technologies, Facilities, Finance, External Liaisons, etc. Think about reaching out to other businesses in your community, chambers of commerce, associations and networks to create a unified plan.

Are there escalation procedures to get additional resources?

If you have more than one business location, allow your local managers to take appropriate actions based on the conditions in each location. Look at current plans to determine at what point do managers need to communicate to upper management that there is a potential problem. Outline appropriate actions in your infectious disease response plan. Also, be ready to act quickly. Resources may not be available if an outbreak strikes and securing them now will ensure you have the resources when you need them.

For public health updates, organizations and employees are encouraged to sign up for Alert Montgomery's Public Health alerts at <https://alert.montgomerycountymd.gov>.