

Swine flu: What your business should be doing right now

Regardless of what course the current Swine Flu outbreak takes, you should consider it a grim reminder of the potential impact a pandemic influenza outbreak could have on your business. Since, according to the World Health Organization, there have been only ten influenza pandemics in the past 300 years, you might consider them a low-frequency risk. Yet even though, thankfully, pandemic flu outbreaks in modern times haven't taken the human toll they once did, the financial impact on business and global trade is much greater than ever before.

Infectious disease outbreaks requiring extended quarantine and isolation of large portions of the population can significantly affect global trade. Whether you are a global company or a local retail business, a flu pandemic could affect every part of your business. You need to consider everything from supply-chain disruption to extended worker absenteeism.

Steps your business should take:

- Develop a pandemic action committee to review, plan and oversee your company's pandemic flu response and how you'll minimize the spread of communicable disease in the workplace.
- Identify critical processes and functions that must continue for your business to remain viable—can some be automated, managed remotely or with fewer employees?
- Evaluate critical suppliers and customers: Do you have critical suppliers located in affected regions? Identify suppliers that provide critical raw materials, component parts or essential services and develop a contingency plan for how you'll operate if they aren't available. Also consider that you may be a critical supplier to your customers. What do you need to do to meet their needs?
- Identify essential employees or expertise: Find ways to protect critical employees through isolation, remote work or medical intervention such as vaccination. Consider travel restrictions for employees to affected areas.
- Review sick leave and disability leave policies as well as any government-mandated leave policies: Encourage healthy employees to come to work and ill employees to stay home unless mandates are in place.
- Review physical and security considerations: Look around your workplace and consider promoting social distancing (three to six feet) between employee workstations to minimize potential infections.
- Develop communication and employee packages: Keep your employees informed on what your company is doing to help keep them healthy along with general information on pandemic flu.
- Align action steps with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) pandemic stages: Check their websites to learn about the identified stages of a pandemic and align your plan to the appropriate stage.

If you are a Zurich customer or distributor and would like additional information, please call 1-800-982-5964 or e-mail refeedback@zurichna.com.

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