



No. 5
January, 2007

To date, no case of avian flu caused by the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus has been detected in the Americas

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) recommends that all countries and communities of the Americas prepare themselves for a possible flu pandemic

e-FluINFO may be freely reproduced and distributed.

Modifications of the text or format are not permitted.

For questions or comments,
e-mail: FluInfo@paho.org
or contact the Ministry of Health in your country



WHAT CAN SMALL BUSINESSES DO TO PREPARE FOR A POSSIBLE INFLUENZA PANDEMIC?

An influenza pandemic is a flu outbreak on a global scale. A pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges that is both highly aggressive and easily transmissible between humans. During the past century, three influenza pandemics were registered. The most severe pandemic, in 1918-1919, affected one-third of the global population, killed an estimated 40 million people, and caused social and economic disruption around the world.

The international community has been on alert since 2003, when a new highly aggressive avian influenza virus, H5N1, caused large outbreaks in birds (“bird flu”). These outbreaks spread from Asia through Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. The H5N1 virus causes severe flu in many types of birds, including chickens. However, influenza viruses are known for their ability to change. If the avian H5N1 flu virus gains the ability to infect and transmit easily between humans, the chances of a new global influenza pandemic would increase.

Why do businesses need to prepare?

A pandemic can affect businesses’ capacity to produce goods and deliver services to their customers. In a matter of weeks, a pandemic virus could easily spread throughout the world, infecting many people in a short period of time. At the peak of a pandemic, as much as 30-50 percent of the workforce may be unavailable to work due to illness, the need to care for sick family members, and school and daycare closings, etc. Small businesses are particularly at risk due to their financial vulnerability and their dependency on a relatively small number of employees, suppliers, and clients. Every business—and especially those that provide essential community services—should prepare a contingency plan to ensure business continuity in case of a pandemic, a major disaster, or an emergency of any kind.

Prepare a business continuity plan

What can be done now to prepare?

The following are some key aspects to consider in developing a small business contingency plan:

- ! **Protect your business.**
 - ◇ Identify your business’s core people and skills.
 - ◇ Train and prepare ancillary workers in essential tasks that would be needed to maintain business operations during a pandemic.
 - ◇ Find out which of your suppliers have a business continuity plan, and on whom you could rely in case of a pandemic.
 - ◇ Determine the potential impact of a pandemic on your company’s financials.
- ! **Protect your employees and clients.**
 - ◇ Establish special policies for employee compensation and sick leave in case of a pandemic.
 - ◇ Establish policies for preventing the spread of influenza in the workplace (e.g., barring employees with flu symptoms, promoting cough and sneezing etiquette and hand washing, etc.).
 - ◇ Equip your facilities with good personal hygiene supplies, including soap, paper towels, and tissues.
- ! **Test your plan.**



Sick with flu?
Stay home

e-FluINFO will help you identify effective community measures to reduce human transmission of an influenza virus and the impact of the next influenza pandemic.