



North Carolina Telecommunications Industry Association

Preparing and Protecting Against the Threat of a Pandemic Flu

Although a pandemic will not damage power lines or hack into computer networks, it can ultimately threaten critical infrastructure by removing essential personnel from the workplace for weeks or even months. The threat of a pandemic flu epidemic could become a virus-caused catastrophe that would disrupt the flow of essential goods and services our society needs to function properly.

Telecommunications Preparations

As part of the telecommunications industry, each member company of NCTIA plays a huge role in its relationship with the public. Each company touches large portions of the North Carolina population on a daily basis, through employer-employee and vendor-customer relationships. Because of the crucial role of telecommunications in our society, it is important that each member company prepares for the future threat of the pandemic flu.

Avoid an “Infodemic”

Knowledge and preparation build off one another, so it is vital that each company educates itself on the impending threats of the pandemic flu. Emergency plans should be created without miscommunications and language confusion, so that logical and rational decisions are made at necessary times. The rapid spread of information with miscommunications and misunderstanding could bring about an “infodemic,” which is equally threatening economically to a company.

“Plans are nothing, planning is everything.” – Dwight D. Eisenhower

Once clarifications are made, however, it is critical that each company develops plans that will encompass all hypothetical situations during a breakout of the pandemic. A key in planning, then, is to ask, “Can we run this facility with 30% to 40% absenteeism?” Questions such as these can help your company prepare for the worst while hoping for the best. They help focus planning on the essentials that a vital to a company’s survival.

Guidelines for Planning

Here are tips for NCTIA member companies when planning for the threat of a future outbreak of pandemic flu.

- Decide who should participate in developing an emergency plan
 - Include co-workers from all levels
 - Consider a broad cross-section of people
 - Focus on people who have expertise vital to daily business functions

- Establish an ethic of infection control in the workplace that is reinforced during the annual influenza season
 - Improve air circulation and filtration
 - Stock up on masks and sanitizers
 - Consider staggering work shifts to limit the size of groups at work
- Advise employees to get flu shots and anti-virals
 - Track employees' annual influenza vaccinations
 - Remember that no vaccine for H5N1 (Avian Flu) currently exists
 - Consider stockpiling antiviral drugs
- Establish contingency systems to maintain delivery of essential services during times of significant employee absenteeism
- Cross train employees
- Keep communication lines open with employees to limit the pandemic's impact
 - Wash hand regularly
 - Do not cover sneezes and coughs with hands
 - Drink plenty of fluids
 - Routinely disinfect surfaces
 - Avoid close contact with anyone feeling ill, coughing, or sneezing
 - Do not go to work if feeling ill
- Contact the state or local health department of any symptomatic employees or suspected exposure incidents
- If possible, establish mechanisms for employees to provide services from home if there is a health advisory against non-essential travel
 - Supply employees with equipment and support to telecommute
 - Remember that many other industries will have employees who telecommute, which will put added pressure on the telecommunications industry
- Store copies of all critical information in off-site locations
- Plan an emergency payroll
- Establish partnerships with other members to provide mutual support and maintenance of essential services
- Consider arrangements to secure work premises in cases of short or long term periods of vacancy

"It is a bad plan that admits no modification." – Publilius Syrus, *Maxims*

NCTIA encourages all of its member companies to develop emergency plans for the avian flu, so no company is unprepared. It will also be important to continuously fine-tune the plan as new information and discoveries about H5N1 are made.

For further information about the pandemic flu and preparations for it, visit the following sites:

- www.cdc.gov/flu/avian
- <http://www.pandemicflu.gov>
- http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/
- www.ready.gov/business/index.html
- www.avianflu.gov
- www.usda.gov/wds/portal/