

PREPARING FOR AN AVIAN FLU PANDEMIC

By [David P. Jendrzejek](#)



How Businesses Should Plan

Federal and state agencies and various international organizations have been preparing for the pandemic for several years. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), the federal agency assigned to spearhead the national response, recommends that private businesses “develop specific plans for the ways that you would protect your employees and maintain operations during a pandemic.” Like other business continuity or business disruption plans, preparing for an avian flu pandemic requires careful planning. Following are some of the steps that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends to help businesses prepare:

- **Plan for the impact on your business.** Identify a coordinator or team responsible for preparedness and response planning. Identify essential employees and critical inputs, such as suppliers and services, required to maintain operations during a pandemic. Plan for scenarios likely to change demand for your products and services during a pandemic. Determine the impact on business related travel. Find up to date, reliable pandemic information from public sources and make sustainable links. Establish an emergency communications plan.
- **Plan for the impact on your employees and customers.** Forecast and allow for employee absences due to factors such as fear of exposure, personal illness, caring for sick relatives, and school and public transportation closures. Implement guidelines to reduce the frequency of face-to-face contact (e.g., hand-shaking, shared workstations). Evaluate employee access to health care services during a pandemic. Identify key employees and customers with special needs.
- **Establish written policies for dealing with a pandemic.** Establish policies for employee compensation and sick leave absences unique to a pandemic. Establish policies for flexible worksites (e.g., telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts). Establish policies for preventing the spread of flu at the worksite and restricting travel to affected areas.
- **Educate your employees.** Develop and distribute information about pandemic fundamentals and your preparedness and response plan. Anticipate employee fear and anxiety, and plan communications accordingly. Develop communication platforms (e.g., hotlines, dedicated websites) for communicating pandemic status actions to employees, vendors, suppliers, and customers.
- **Coordinate with external organizations.** Collaborate with insurers and health plans to share your pandemic plans and understand their capabilities and plans. Collaborate with federal, state, and local public health agencies to participate in their planning processes.

Education and outreach are critical to preparing for a pandemic. A copy of the CDC's checklist may be found at www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/businesschecklist.pdf.

To obtain additional information regarding avian flu and updates regarding this situation, visit these websites: www.pandemicflu.gov or www.avianflu.gov (HHS), www.cdc.gov/business (CDC), www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/flu/pandemic/index.html (Minnesota Department of Health), or www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza (WHO).

David P. Jendrzejek practices employment law with an emphasis on litigation. He represents businesses in lawsuits alleging discrimination and other employment-based claims and in the prosecution and defense of related business claims involving trade secrets, covenants not to compete and other matters. He may be reached at Jendrzejek@moss-barnett.com.