

READY NEW YORK FOR BUSINESS

PREPARE YOUR BUSINESS FOR THE FLU

With recent reports of H1N1 flu in New York City, business owners and managers should prepare their businesses for the potential effects of the spread of this virus.

Additional cases are likely to emerge in coming weeks and the Health Department will continue to investigate possible clusters. "We suspect that swine flu is the predominant strain of influenza in New York City right now," said Dr. Thomas R. Frieden, New York City Health Commissioner. "So far, virtually all confirmed and suspected cases have been mild and all the patients we know of have recovered or are recovering." Some severe cases are likely in people with underlying risk factors – such as young children, the elderly, and people with chronic medical conditions. The Health Department is watching closely for signs of increased strength of the virus.

Business Continuity Planning for Swine Flu

While many large companies have in-house emergency planners and business continuity professionals, 98 percent of city businesses are small, family-owned establishments that cannot afford a disaster planning staff. Below, you will find a short outline of several steps to consider in preparing your business for a pandemic.

- **Consider the effect on your business.** Potential disruptions could include supply shortages, changes in demand for your product or services, and employee absenteeism—due to illness and the need to care for sick family members and/or children released from school.
- **Identify essential employees** responsible for running the operations that are critical to your business's continued functioning. Designate back-ups for these essential tasks, and cross-train employees to allow your business to function in the absence of key staff members.
- **Review your employee compensation and sick-leave policies.** A pandemic influenza could present your business with high levels of absenteeism. If employees are sick with flu-like symptoms, they should stay at home for at least seven days to protect their own health, the health of your customers and other employees, and the overall health of the community. Consider how you can change your policies to appropriately address this situation.

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- **Prevent the spread of flu.** Encourage your employees to wash their hands thoroughly and often, to cover coughs and sneezes, and to stay home if they are sick. Clean frequently touched surfaces, such as doorknobs and copy machines. Make hand sanitizer available to your staff. For more information, read the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's [Guidance for Preventing Transmission of H1N1 Influenza in the Workplace](#).
- **Reduce person-to-person contact.** If possible, allow employees to telecommute. Stagger shifts or condense the work week, so that fewer people are in the workplace at any one time. Construct barriers—like sneeze-guards—to put in place between your employees and the public.
- **Collaborate with insurers and health care providers.** Make sure you understand what their plans and capabilities are, and how they can support you and your employees.
- **Communicate with your employees.** Your employees are your business's most critical resource. Keep them informed about what you are doing, and let them know how they can protect themselves.
- **Take advantage of additional resources.** It's not known whether this swine flu will be the cause of a pandemic influenza, but commonsense health practices will help reduce the spread of *any* flu virus. *Ready New York: Pandemic Flu* is now available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, French, Italian, Polish, Arabic, Korean, Haitian Creole, Greek, Bengali, Urdu, and Yiddish. Visit the following sites for more information about pandemic influenza and business continuity practices:
 - ▶ [Download a copy of *Ready New York: Pandemic Flu*](#)
 - ▶ [Visit the Health Department's website](#)
 - ▶ [Read more tips on how to stay healthy from the CDC](#)
 - ▶ [Use the business checklist from pandemicflu.gov](#)