



Human Resources mailshot

Are you planning for a flu pandemic?

The World Health Organisation and the government are telling us to brace ourselves and be prepared for the next flu pandemic.

Flu season is upon us, and all fingers are crossed in the hope that any outbreaks won't be more serious than usual. Still, individuals and businesses are advised to be prepared now, and in the future, for the possibility of a deadly flu pandemic, similar to those that killed thousands of people in 1918, 1957 and 1968.

A flu pandemic occurs when a new flu virus emerges which is different from any other and to which humans have little or no immunity. Because of this lack of immunity, the virus is able to infect more humans over a large geographical area and spread rapidly and efficiently from one person to another. There are concerns that the currently circulating 'Bird Flu' may give rise to the next pandemic flu virus. It has recently killed 3 children in Turkey, and it is believed to be the same strain that has been reported in 142 other human cases since January 2004.

So what can your company do?

Forward planning can help, no matter how unpredictable a pandemic might be. Most disaster recovery programmes focus on dealing with a short, sharp shock, such as a terrorist attack. Flu plans need to take account of changed ways of working that may last for months.

Pandemic planning

Research suggests that companies worldwide are failing to create contingency plans for the crisis a global flu outbreak might cause.

We would recommend that you now:

- Consider the implications of staff absence at a time when the workload for some may be increased.
- Establish minimum staffing levels.
- Identify a 'front-line' group of essential employees.

- Look at ways of redeploying staff to do jobs they may not be trained to do or are not familiar with, or to recruit additional staff or volunteers.
- Set up systems for vetting additional staff, including volunteers.
- Look at overnight accommodation - for example, portable accommodation for people to rest between shifts when transport may be difficult or disrupted.
- Make sure staff rosters allow for adequate break and leave periods to ensure a sustainable response over several weeks.

Staff training is essential. Key issues include:

- Make sure staff training is tailored to the unusual working conditions.
- Plan and organise training for volunteers.
- Teach staff how to handle and work with volunteers.
- Keep a database of former or recently retired clinical staff or local doctors who may be called upon to help. Include the need for surge capacity - the ability to meet increased demand - in regular planning.

To discuss how Berg Legal can assist you with these issues, please contact Alison Loveday at alisonl@berg.co.uk, our partner in our Human Resources Department. Alternatively you can call Alison on 0161 833 9211.

berg legal 35 peter street manchester m2 5bg
t. 0161 833 9211 f. 0161 834 5566 e. help@berg.co.uk
www.berg.co.uk Regulated by the Law Society

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