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COVID-19:

A Guide for Businesses & Organizations

Background

With Coronavirus spreading through countries far from its origin in China, it is considered by experts to be a pandemic; defined as "**the worldwide spread of a new disease**".

In Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) leads the national response to a pandemic and has activated the Health Portfolio Operations Centre (HPOC), under the Federal / Provincial / Territorial Public Health Response Plan for Biological Events[1]. The Plan details the coordinated response efforts to mitigate risk to individuals and health care providers and to mitigate the social impact in the event of an outbreak.

In the event of an outbreak, the following are among the responsibilities of the federal, provincial and territorial governments:

- Implementing infection control guidelines and healthcare safety and quality standards

- Facilitating the acquisition of medical supplies and protective equipment required to provide the necessary health care services

- Providing health notices and other information relevant to international travel and educating the general public on precautionary measures, public health actions taken and their purpose

- The federal government can exercise powers under the Quarantine Act to help prevent the introduction and spread of communicable diseases in Canada (this can include screenings at points of entry or departure, or detention in isolation for travellers and other potential or confirmed affected individuals). Other social distancing measures can include delaying or cancelling large public gatherings

- Provincial and territorial governments are responsible for providing health care services, medications and vaccines to individuals within their jurisdictions

- Active monitoring and data collection during the public health event

COVID-19 Symptoms & Health Guidelines

It is prudent to take precautionary measures to reduce your risk of contracting or spreading the virus, and to be aware of symptoms and exposures that warrant contacting Public Health for information and instruction.

Symptoms of COVID-19 may be very mild and feel similar to a cold or flu, but they can be severe for others. Symptoms may take up to 14 days to appear, and can include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing
- Pneumonia in both lungs

Risks of getting COVID-19 for most Canadians at this point is low, however, there is higher risk associated with the following:

- Travel to affected areas
- Close contact with someone who has a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19

The Government of Canada advises the following tips to help you stay healthy and prevent the spread of infections:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick

- Cough or sneeze into a tissue and dispose of it immediately or into your sleeve instead of your hands
- Stay home if you are sick to avoid spreading illness to others

Links to the Government of Canada Public Health Agency and provincial public health services have been provided in the Resources & Support section at the end of this document so that you can keep informed on the status of COVID-19 and government-recommended safety measures.

Considerations for Businesses and Organizations
Preparation, not Panic - Develop a Pandemic Response Plan

Canada's health and emergency response systems are widely recognized as some of the best in the world. Over the past two decades, responses to the SARS epidemic and Influenza A (H1N1) pandemic have provided significant learnings.

While Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments oversee major elements of the pandemic planning, individual organizations play a critical role in preparing locally; ensuring a response that is tailored, meets requirements and protects the community. A pandemic response plan, based on risk management principles, can be a very effective way for governing an organization's preparation, planning and resilience.

The following principles may assist to guide the design and governance of your plan:

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Proportionate
Tailor a fit-for-purpose plan for your organization and your services; that clearly speaks about how your organization will be ready and respond.

Inclusive
Ensure employees, volunteers, members, customers and your wider community are informed about your plan and contribute to its design.

Comprehensive
Take a structured and comprehensive approach based on government and other relevant advice.

Integrated
Integrate the plan with your risk management framework, business continuity plan, incident and emergency responses and occupational health & safety (OHS) policies.

Dynamic
Review the plan regularly and report changes to the organization including to your board of directors. Stay on top of new or additional information or requirements as they become available.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

Best Information
Current and emerging information should be made available to key personnel for decision-making and communicated to relevant stakeholders. Ensure information is consistent with Government advice and requirements.

Human Factors
Consult on the development and implementation of the plan at all levels. The plan must reflect how people and cultures interact with its functions and address issues and concerns in a timely manner.

Continual Improvement
Assess the effectiveness and capability of the plan regularly to ensure the approach continues to achieve the desired goal and implement necessary improvements.

Assess Your Organization's Pandemic Risks

It is important that your organization's risk management framework is current and effective. Risks can arise from many associated activities and requirements throughout and after the pandemic event. Assess your risks against the following key aspects of pandemic management:

Financial

- Financial implications are assessed, including cash flow, cost increases, funding disruptions and longer-term impacts

Governance & Compliance

- Regulatory and reporting requirements are known and achievable

- Board oversees the adequacy of the response plan and its implementation, and is briefed on the organization's preparedness and resilience

- Key personnel to lead preparation and risk control systems are appointed

- Current organizational risks are reviewed considering the pandemic issue

- Incident management system can respond to immediate notifications for assessment, decision making and trending

Employee & Volunteer Safety & Wellbeing

- Measures to ensure the health and safety of staff, including volunteers, are incorporated into the pandemic plan and meet relevant OHS regulations and general principles

- Consultation with employees, volunteers and other stakeholders occurs regularly, including the assessment of risk to health and safety and the implementation of control measures

- Employees and volunteers understand their duties to cooperate in implementing risk control measures

- Management systems are in place for handling the situation when people become ill at work, and escalation criteria developed should an employee report or show compatible symptoms

Equipment

- Supply chains are assessed for interruptions and plans are established to source and maintain critical supplies

- Additional equipment and medical supplies are available

Service Delivery

- Capacity to surge or wind down services is assessed and implications for both are identified

- Staffing to accommodate changes in service delivery are planned

Communications & Reputation

- A communications strategy for employees, volunteers, customers and suppliers is developed and implemented, available in formats and languages that meet the needs of your staff and community

- Employees can access policies, procedures and the pandemic prevention plan for advice and guidance

- Feedback from employees and customers is encouraged and responded to in a timely manner

Business Continuity

- The business continuity plan can respond to multiple disruptions (other issues may arise that add to additional disruption)

- The recovery phase of the pandemic is planned for and managed; a planned process is established to normalize work activities and progressively suspend risk control measures

- The impact of the pandemic suffered by employees, volunteers and customers is closely monitored; psychological consequences are considered and counselling support services are available

Care & Clinical Governance

- Clinical and care governance framework is up to date and responds to infection prevention principles and requirements

- Appropriate clinical / health advice is available and accessible and can respond to the specific care needs of vulnerable people

- Preventative strategies that minimize transmission are in place and can be escalated

- Department of Health policies, advice and guidelines are communicated and followed throughout the organization

Resources & Support

World Health Organization: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak
https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/covid-19

Government of Canada, Public Heath Agency of Canada: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resources
https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html

Travel Advice and Advisories: The latest information and advice for safe travel overseas
https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories

PROVINCIAL PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

Alberta
https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16947.aspx

British Columbia
http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/novel-coronavirus-(covid-19)

Manitoba
https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/coronavirus/

New Brunswick
https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/ocmoh/cdc/content/respiratory_diseases/coronavirus.html

Newfoundland & Labrador
https://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/coronavirus/

Northwest Territories
https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en

Nova Scotia
https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/

Nunavut
https://www.gov.nu.ca/health

Ontario
https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus

Ontario Government guidance documents for health and long-term care providers
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx

Prince Edward Island
https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/health-and-wellness/coronavirus-covid-19-infection-frequently-asked-questions

Quebec
https://msss.gouv.qc.ca/professionnels/maladies-infectieuses/coronavirus-2019-ncov/

Saskatchewan
https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/health-care-administration-and-provider-resources/treatment-procedures-and-guidelines/emerging-public-health-issues/2019-novel-coronavirus

Yukon
http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY, AND WORKERS COMPENSATION

Government of Canada (Federal Employees)
https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/notices/coronavirus-occupational-health-safety.html

Alberta
https://www.alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety.aspx

British Columbia
https://www.worksafebc.com/en

Manitoba
https://www.safemanitoba.com/

New Brunswick
https://www.worksafenb.ca/

Newfoundland & Labrador
https://workplacenl.ca/

Northwest Territories and Nunavut
https://www.wscc.nt.ca/

Nova Scotia
https://novascotia.ca/lae/healthandsafety/

Ontario
https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/

Prince Edward Island
http://www.wcb.pe.ca/

Quebec
https://www.csst.qc.ca/en/Pages/all_english_content.aspx

Saskatchewan
http://www.worksafesask.ca/

Yukon
https://wcb.yk.ca/

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