

BCI ADVICE NOTE

April 29th 2009.

Dealing with the potential impact of a swine flu pandemic on your organisation's operations.

The primary impact of a swine flu pandemic will be higher levels of staff absence than normal and for a longer period of time. As the term pandemic refers to the spread of the infection rather than the severity, the time of absence will clearly depend on the severity of the virus and any intervention that the Government may take to delay or mitigate the spread of the virus through restricting the movement of people. *We recommend that you read this advice in conjunction with advice from your health authority on how to reduce the spread of the flu virus within the work environment.*¹

Many organisations already have a Business Continuity Plan which deals with the impact of a loss of people on keeping the organisation working. BT PLC, a member of the BCI Partnership, has an advanced programme that includes:

- Creating a BT wide strategy for pandemics as a framework for all parts of the business to work within.
- Exercising pandemic plans at the most senior level. This raises awareness of the topic as well as tests the plans.
- Forming Agora (<http://bcagora.com/charter>), an online pandemic planning community, and using it to broaden their thinking beyond the company.
- Having an expert dedicated to the task of pandemic planning.
- Having a core team running, comprising Chief Medical Officer, HR Director, Pandemic/BC expert, Communications and Risk & Insurance, to make decisions in advance and to stick to them.

For those who do not have a plan or the time to develop one against the BCI's Good Practice Guidelines, there are some essential steps that need to be considered:

What activities are essential to keep your business running?

You will not be able to do everything. If you are in a people intensive business or key aspects of your business rely on people, you will need to prioritise what is most important to keep it running. Remember that your suppliers and customers will be doing the same, so communicate with them.

You also need to review staff policies and insurance policies to make sure you have the flexibility you may require and cover for staff and interruptions to your business.

Where are you going to continue to run your business?

You may need to enable staff to work from home or different office locations. You may find that customers or suppliers will help you out as well.

¹ For example, "Pandemic Flu – Guidance for Businesses" issued by the UK's Department of Health", which is also available to download from the BCI's website.

Who are you relying upon?

You are not going to have a choice on who falls ill, but you might want to reduce the likelihood of infection by reducing human contact for those with key skills, who cannot be easily replaced.

When are you going to take these actions?

National governments and public health agencies will provide guidance on the extent and severity of the pandemic. It is likely that they will have a process of increasing mitigating measures depending on the profile of the flu virus. Your response needs to reflect the advice you receive from these sources.

If schools and child care facilities are closed then many businesses will see a significant increase in absence rates beyond those enforced through illness alone. You should look at validating your thinking/plan against absence levels of at least 25% and up to 50% for periods of two and four weeks respectively in order to really understand the impact that the pandemic could bring.

How are you going to implement these steps?

You need to work out who is going to perform the key tasks to deliver on the plan you have developed. Communication with staff will be key as you will need their goodwill and support to work through the disruption. They will be anxious and have their own problems. You also need to plan how you will respond to enquiries from customers and suppliers, and potentially the media.

Further help?

If you are looking for professional help to develop a Business Continuity Plan, please check the Consultancy Register <http://www.thebci.org/consultancyregister.htm> and BCI Partnership website <http://www.bcipartnership.com/virtualexpo.html> for organisations that are able to provide advice. The BCI itself is not able to offer consultancy services.

About Business Continuity Management

Business Continuity Management (BCM) identifies potential threats to an organisation and the impacts to business operations that those threats if realised might cause. It provides a framework for building organisational resilience with the capability for an effective response that safeguards the interests of key stakeholders, reputation, brand and value-creating activities.

About the Business Continuity Institute

The Business Continuity Institute (BCI) was founded in 1994 and leads on the development of best practice in Business Continuity Management. The BCI also contributes to relevant legislation and standards. It has some 4,600 members in over 80 countries active in an estimated 3,000 organisations in private, public and third sectors. The BCI Partnership, established in 2007, is the corporate body within the BCI with over 60 member organisations including BT, BSI Management Systems, Continuity Shop, Marsh, Milton Keynes Council, BP, SunGard, BAE Systems, Community Resilience UK, Continuity SA, EADS, Garrison Continuity, HBOS, Prudential, PwC, Royal Mail, and the UK Government's Cabinet Office.

Contacting the Business Continuity Institute

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