

COOP- Health Emergency Section

Introduction

As part of the Department of **[Insert Dept Name]** COOP plan, the health emergency section will outline processes and procedures associated with incidents affecting the health and well-being of department employees.

General emergency preparedness requires attention not only to specific types of hazards, but also steps that increase preparedness for any type of hazard. Health emergencies may be part of a broader incident or are emergencies that can be addressed according to their unique circumstances, such as incidents that increase employee absenteeism (i.e. influenza), induce social distancing as a preventative measure (i.e. pandemic), or other alternative workplace issue that may require the enactment of this COOP plan. Types of health emergencies, and related critical situations, include (but not limited to):

- **Influenza & Other Viral Outbreaks-** Influenza and other viral outbreaks are health illnesses that can be easily transmitted from human-to-human contact in the workplace or at home.
- **Bio-terrorism-** A bioterrorism attack is the deliberate release of viruses, bacteria, or other germs (agents) used to cause illness or death in people, animals, or plants.
- **Chemical Emergencies-** A chemical emergency occurs when a hazardous chemical has been released and the release has the potential for harming people's health. Chemical releases can be unintentional, as in the case of an industrial accident, or intentional, as in the case of a terrorist attack.
- **Mass Casualty Incidents-** MCI situations may cause employees to suffer bodily harm and emotional/physical stress after a mass casualty event (i.e. terrorism) even if they are not at or near the scene.

Although the list above is not inclusive, these are general emergencies that can affect the health and well-being of employees. Typically, a COOP plan will be enacted for health emergencies when absenteeism in the workplace approaches 30 – 40 % of the workforce. Instances where this may occur include widespread viral outbreaks, such as an influenza pandemic.

In **table 1 (see next page)**, differences between a seasonal influenza outbreak and pandemic incident are compared on many levels. A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. A pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges that people have little or no immunity, and for which there is no vaccine. The disease spreads easily person-to-person, causes serious illness, and can sweep across the country and around the world in very short time. It is difficult to predict when the next influenza pandemic will occur or how severe it will be. Wherever and whenever a pandemic starts, everyone around the world is at risk.

Table 1- Seasonal Influenza v. Pandemic Influenza

Seasonal Influenza	Pandemic Influenza
Outbreaks follow predictable seasonal patterns; occurs annually, usually in winter, in temperate climates	Occurs rarely (three times in 20th century - last in 1968)
Usually some immunity built up from previous exposure	No previous exposure; little or no pre-existing immunity
Healthy adults usually not at risk for serious complications; the very young, the elderly and those with certain underlying health conditions at increased risk for serious complications	Healthy people may be at increased risk for serious complications
Health systems can usually meet public and patient needs	Health systems may be overwhelmed
Vaccine developed based on known flu strains and available for annual flu season	Vaccine probably would not be available in the early stages of a pandemic
Adequate supplies of antivirals are usually available	Effective antivirals may be in limited supply
Average U.S. deaths approximately 36,000/yr	Number of deaths could be quite high (e.g., U.S. 1918 death toll approximately 675,000)
Symptoms: fever, cough, runny nose, muscle pain. Deaths often caused by complications, such as pneumonia.	Symptoms may be more severe and complications more frequent
Generally causes modest impact on society (e.g., some school closing, encouragement of people who are sick to stay home)	May cause major impact on society (e.g. widespread restrictions on travel, closings of schools and businesses, cancellation of large public gatherings)
Manageable impact on domestic and world economy	Potential for severe impact on domestic and world economy

Source: www.pandemicflu.gov

Department Processes and Action Items

During a health emergency, the following processes and action items will be conducted:

1. Communicate health emergency situation or applicable incident to County Manager's Office.

[In this space, identify department processes applicable to this objective]

2. Identify department procedure to document employees ill during this time, including County and department policies regarding sick leave and other applicable policies.

[In this space, identify department processes applicable to this objective]

3. Identify chain of command during a health crisis. The chart below outlines a responsible person and alternate for this department.

[Assign primary chain of command and alternate chain of command during a health emergency or pandemic event. Also, identify a primary and alternate contact for day-to-day updates/correspondence on health related information within your department]

Health Emergency Command Group		
	<i>Responsible Person</i>	<i>Alternate</i>
Name		
Title		
Contact Info (Ph, Email)		
Name		
Title		
Contact Info (Ph, Email)		
<i>Department Contact for Health Related Information and Planning</i>		
Name		
Title		
Contact Info (Ph, Email)		

4. Activation of COOP during a health emergency (i.e. offsite or alternate worksite, laptops, etc).

[In this space, identify department processes applicable to this objective]

5. Reporting and monitoring of health incident.

[In this space, identify department processes applicable to this objective]

Preventative Measures and Tips

During any type of health emergency, preventative measures can be taken to mitigate the effects on the workforce. Such measures include:

- Encourage employees to develop family preparedness plans.
- Participate and promote public health efforts within the department.
- Implement prevention and control actions recommended by your public health officials and providers.

- Identify and adopt department practices that encourage sick employees to stay home.
- Practice good health habits, including eating a balanced diet, exercising daily, and getting sufficient rest and take these common-sense steps to stop the spread of germs.
 - Wash hands frequently with soap and water.
 - Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues.
 - Stay away from others as much as possible if you are sick.
- Stay informed about pandemic influenza and be prepared to respond.
 - Consult www.pandemicflu.gov frequently for updates on national and international information on pandemic influenza.
 - Use national and local pandemic hotlines that will be established in the eventuality of a global influenza outbreak.
 - Listen to radio and television and read media stories about pandemic flu.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) may be utilized based on the type and severity of the health emergency and its use varies based on the setting of the employees, i.e., general office, hospital, health care provider setting, etc. Adhere to guidance and recommendations given by public health officials at the time of the health emergency. PPE items can include some or all of the items below:

- OSHA approved disposable facemasks, surgical masks, N95 respirators
- Gloves
- Alcohol based hand-sanitizer (individual units or sanitizer stations)
- Antibacterial surface wipes or sprays

Important Links and Resources

- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, www.hhs.gov
- Pandemic Flu, www.pandemicflu.gov, www.avianflu.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), www.cdc.gov , www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu (for H1N1)
- Miami-Dade County Health Department, www.dadehealth.org, www.dadehealth.org/h1n1/swineflu.asp (H1N1)
- Florida Department of Health, <http://doh.state.fl.us/>, www.MyFluSafety.com