

## Influenza A (H1N1):

What is your plan if 1/3 of your employees don't show up to work?  
How do you communicate with your customers?

### Situation:

Canadian and provincial health officials have a plan to mitigate the potential danger of Influenza A(H1N1). Their strategies include the development and distribution of a vaccine, to all Canadians; as well as the roll out of an extensive information campaign to ensure the public understands what it can do to protect itself against the outbreak.

The good news is that health officials assure us that for the majority of the population, Influenza A(H1N1) is only a nuisance. It is a flu we will suffer and recover from in approximately a week or two. For those with underlying health issues, and in relatively few instances, H1N1 has resulted in much more serious complications and even mortality.

While there is no full-blown outbreak at this time, it is nonetheless prudent to consider proper crisis planning now.

### What are the risks?

15 to 35% of your employees may be ill at any one time. According to a report prepared by the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME), businesses should plan for up to 50% staff absences for periods of about two weeks at the height of the crisis<sup>1</sup>, and lower levels of absence for a few weeks on either side of the peak. Overall, a pandemic wave may last about eight weeks.

The risks include:

- large part of a company's work force off work due to illness
- large number of employees off work due to the need to stay home and care for family members who are ill or cannot attend school due to closures
- corporate management becomes ill and is off work
- company production delays
- inability to serve public due to staff shortages
- infection of customers
- employee dissent over management inaction

H1N1 can potentially affect companies of all sizes and could have significant repercussions on employee morale and customer service. It will not be business as usual. The manner in which companies deal with the situation will impact their reputation and brand.

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<sup>1</sup> Information derived in the context of the Avian Flu (2006)

## **Business Continuity Planning/Communications Planning**

This brief document is to get you thinking about this threat and to start planning now—if you have not yet done so. Here are a few suggestions regarding the communications aspect:

### **Develop a Business Continuity Plan**

- Having and sharing a plan within your company will enhance its image with employees, shareholders and customers by demonstrating a proactive stance.
- Identify an H1N1 pandemic coordinator and information officer
- Identify the necessary resources to support business continuity, including personnel, communications, equipment, financial allocations, legal counsel, infrastructure protection and accommodations.

### **Establish a Communications Plan**

You may have the most comprehensive and up-to-date business continuity plan possible, but without effective communication with your employees, management, other business units in your organization, government, key suppliers, and customers, your plan will fail.

Communicate the risks related to staff shortages and your organization's preparedness to manage it – very early to staff.

- Provide employees with information to help them prevent an outbreak.
- Anticipate employee anxiety, rumors and misinformation, and plan communications accordingly.
- Identify key contacts (with alternates) and a chain of communications (including suppliers and customers) via a communications tree.
- Develop platforms (e.g. hotlines, dedicated websites) to communicate pandemic status and actions to employees, vendors, suppliers, and customers in a consistent and timely manner, including redundancies in the emergency contact system. Take nothing for granted.
- Identify sources from public health officials for timely and accurate pandemic information (domestic and international) and resources for obtaining counter-measures.

### **Communications Tactics**

- Inform employees of measures taken to prevent H1N1
- Identify your local vaccination center
- Provide information on physicians and medical clinics in the immediate area in the event that someone shows flu like symptoms on the job

- Implement a dedicated H1N1 email database
- Develop and post H1N1 related documents on corporate intranet sites
- Create an FAQ
- Keep employees informed
- Develop a 1-800 information line
- Conduct ongoing media monitoring to stay abreast of the evolving situation
- Keep things in perspective.

**Implement an exercise drill to test your plan and revise it as required.**

#### **About MaisonBrison Communications**

MaisonBrison Communications has generated this information piece on Influenza A(H1N1) Communications Planning for the benefit of its clients and as a public service initiative.

For more than a quarter century MaisonBrison has been delivering innovative, results-oriented corporate communications programs to publicly traded and privately held companies. Driven by a passion for excellence, the multi-disciplined MaisonBrison team strives to exceed client expectations with best practice solutions in investor relations, public relations, crisis management, employee communications, and graphic arts. MaisonBrison consistently endeavours to be a performance leader.

#### **Contact info:**

Rick Leckner  
President

(514) 731-0000