



Pandemics

A pandemic occurs when a novel strain of a virus appears that causes readily transmissible human illness for which most of the population lacks immunity. History shows that influenza pandemics typically occur with very little warning and hit wide geographic areas in multiple waves, lasting two to three months at a time. Health experts acknowledge that there is no way to determine with certainty if a variant strain of the H5N1 virus (known as "Bird Flu") or another disease altogether will cause the next pandemic. History shows, however, that there is great potential for a pandemic to strike some time in the foreseeable future -- not if, but when.

The Federal Government estimates that as much as 40 percent of the Nation's workforce--including personnel supporting our critical communications infrastructure--will be absent during the height of a pandemic. Significant changes in work practices may considerably alter communications traffic due to increased telecommuting by the Nation's workforce and society in general. These work changes may result in disruptions to communications networks. There may also be a lack of manpower to maintain and restore communications networks that shutdown due to an increased surge in traffic from people telecommuting. Such lack of restoration personnel may contribute to sustained and prolonged disruptions in communications systems and the inability of various segments of society to send and receive phone calls, text messages, or email.

In planning for pandemics, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) must consider internal and external factors and issues. From the internal perspective, the FCC, as well as other public and private organizations, must assess the operational risks of a pandemic and ensure that the Commission has sufficient plans in place to deal with any impacts on the Commission due to a pandemic. The Commission must also be concerned about the effects on communications networks stemming from such a public health crisis. The Commission is committed to assisting Federal and state agencies in maintaining robust emergency communications infrastructures and providing the public with the means to access critical public health and community-related information and updates.

To help address this issue, the FCC, primarily through its Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, in coordination with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the National Communications System, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is focusing on business continuity planning as it relates to sustaining the communications infrastructure and networks for voice and data services in response to a pandemic threat - including wireline and wireless phones, the Internet, Personal Digital Assistants, pagers, and faxes and other telecommunications devices and systems.

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FastLinks

Pandemic FAQs

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/faq/index.html>

National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza (NSPI)

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/pandemic-influenza-implementation.html>

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/nspi.pdf>

HHS - Pandemic Flu Planning

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>

Community Mitigation Strategies

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/community/commitigation.html>

Critical Infrastructure Guide

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/cikrpandemicinfluenzaguide.pdf>

NIAC: Prioritization of Critical Infrastructure

http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/niac/niac-pandemic-wg_v8-011707.pdf

Ready.Gov! Continuity of Operations

<http://www.ready.gov/business/plan/influenza.html>

CDC Operations Plan

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/cdcplan.htm>

DOL - Preparing the Workplace for Pandemics

http://www.osha.gov/Publications/influenza_pandemic.html

http://www.osha.gov/Publications/influenza_pandemic.html#steps_employers_can_take

Federal Guidance on Telecommuting

<http://www.opm.gov/telework/documents/Guide.asp>

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