



Public Health

Seattle & King County

HEALTHY PEOPLE. HEALTHY COMMUNITIES.

Dorothy F. Teeter, MHA, *Interim Director and Health Officer*

The Impact of Pandemic Flu on Businesses

Revised October 3, 2005

The Current Situation: A Mutating Virus on the Loose?

Scientists are closely monitoring an uncontrolled bird flu virus that could be the birth of a new and potentially deadly strain of *human* influenza. The bird flu outbreak began in Asia and has spread to Russia, and now threatens Eastern Europe.

Influenza viruses are highly unstable and have the ability to mutate rapidly, possibly jumping from one animal species to another. Scientists fear the bird flu virus could evolve into a form that would spread easily between people, resulting in an extremely contagious disease worldwide.

There have been some human infections so far that have been blamed on direct contact with infected chickens and their droppings. Over 50% of those who have contracted the disease have died.

Potential United States and King County Impacts:

The CDC predicts that that as much as 25% to 30% of the US population could be affected by a pandemic. Undoubtedly, a pandemic flu would be disruptive and costly to business. Up to 35% of the workforce could be affected at any given time. The economic impact in the United States could reach \$166.5 billion

In King County, we could see 1.2 million people infected in the first 6 weeks; 245,000 - 612,000 clinically ill; 180,000 - 470,000 outpatient medical visits; 24,436 – 57,216 people hospitalized, and 600 – 2,700 deaths.

Absenteeism:

Absences from work will depend largely on the age group most affected by the virus. A quarter or more of the working population may have to take days off work at some stage during the pandemic. In addition to absence due to illness, some workers may need time off to care for family members or may have difficulty getting to work. Some workers may be in mourning.

Changes in Business Culture:

A person infected with influenza virus can be contagious for 24 hours before the onset of symptoms, and for seven days thereafter, making it extremely easy for the virus to spread rapidly to large numbers of people.

Businesses may consider implementing telecommuting options to reduce the number of employees in the work place, and requiring employees who may be ill or are ill to stay home.

Office of the Director

999 Third Avenue, Suite 1200 · Seattle, WA 98104-4039

T 206-296-4600 F 206-296-0166 TTY Relay: 711

www.metrokc.gov/health



Continuity of Essential Business and Community Services:

A sudden and prolonged reduction in workforce numbers due to the impacts of pandemic flu may require some businesses to prioritize their essential business functions and temporarily suspend others.

Some business services may be more immediately in demand and necessary for preserving overall economic stability and community well-being, such as services and products that sustain everyday life and support the institutions people will turn to for help in a pandemic. (For example, grocery stores and banking services, medical supply delivery, etc.)

Movement of People, Goods, and Services:

A flu pandemic will impact all business sectors through the illness itself and the consequences of staff sickness, travel restrictions, reduced transport and deliveries etc.

Social Distancing to Reduce the Spread of Disease:

Strategies for slowing the spread of a severe influenza outbreak could include temporarily closing schools, sports arenas, theaters and other public gathering places and facilities.

Workforce Education:

Each pandemic is different and the impact on business cannot be fully established until more is known about how a pandemic is evolving. Business can begin now to encourage hygiene practices that may slow or stop the spread of germs.

What happened in the previous pandemics?

Previous pandemics affected large numbers of the population, caused many deaths and resulted in severe economic and social disruption.

Year	1918-1919	1957-1958	1968-1969
Flu type	'Spanish' Flu	'Asian' Flu	'Hong Kong' Flu
Likely origin	Uncertain (1st documented cases in Europe/USA)	China	China
Estimated deaths - Global	50 million	1 million	1 million
Estimated deaths - US	500,000	70,000	34,000