



Pandemic Preparedness For Employers

NEW PANDEMIC THREAT: EMPLOYERS SHOULD REVIEW POLICIES AND EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

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Health experts have long warned that the question is not whether we will have a pandemic, but when one will strike. Now, world governments and health organizations are closely monitoring outbreaks of swine flu that have killed more than 100 people and sickened more than 1,400 across Mexico. The World Health Organization (WHO) said this outbreak has "pandemic potential." Worse, the organization said it may be too late to contain the sudden outbreak. The United States declared a health emergency, however, the White House said, "It's not a time to panic." The disease has apparently reached Canada, New Zealand and Spain and the states of California, Kansas, New York, Ohio and Texas.

All employers should pay close attention to these developments and if they haven't already, begin to prepare for the day when 40% or more of their workforce is absent due to a pandemic. Employers need to think outside of the normal business operations and consider revising some policies or benefits.

The following is a checklist outlining actions employers should consider in preparing for a pandemic. Many of these changes may also be appropriate preparations for other types of workplace crises.

- Provide employees with free or discounted flu shots.
- Provide employees with free or discounted tetanus shots.
- Review safety policies and practices.
- Buy an insurance policy for short term disability and salary continuation programs.
- Revise attendance and leave policies.
- Revise vacation or paid time off policies.
- Revise "no loans" and "no pay advances" policies.
- Have a Disaster Communications Policy and System.
- Revise telecommuting policies
- Revise travel policies.

- Allow for loans and hardship withdrawals from 401(k) Plans.
- Contact vendors and suppliers.
- Engage an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- Develop a relationship with a professional health care provider, or consider hiring a company physician or nurse.
- Review policy statements, handbooks, contracts, insurance-related documents and collective bargaining agreements.

These suggestions are just a few actions that employers should consider taking now to prepare for a pandemic or similar crisis in the workforce. The current outbreak in Mexico and other countries and the cautionary statements from several health organizations make preparations more critical. This brief list is not intended to be all-inclusive and there may be other appropriate actions that particular employers should consider.

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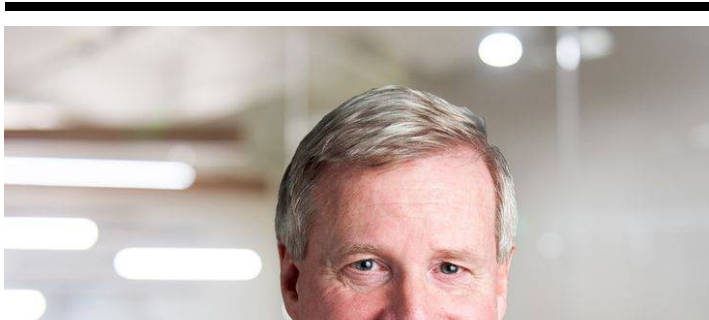


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