



# **Preparing for Pandemic Influenza: Re-Thinking Employee Health & Wellness Before a Crisis Affects Your Workplace**

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An influenza pandemic could have a major effect on the economy and all areas of commerce and employment. Business planning for pandemic influenza is essential to minimize a pandemic's impact. In the event of an influenza pandemic, employers will play a critical role in protecting employees' health, safety, and overall well-being.

Responsible employers should take this preventative planning seriously and immediately begin preparing for the day when 40 percent or more of their workforce could be absent due to a pandemic or a similar crisis. Influenza planning should be based upon traditional infection control and industrial hygiene practices, plus non-traditional modifications to employee-related policies and procedures that will assist employees in maintaining their physical and mental health and/or recovery during a period of crisis. Employers need to think outside of the normal paradigms to consider which policies or benefits should be revised. This article outlines a few actions employers should consider in preparing for this scenario:

1. Provide employees with free or discounted flu shots.
2. Provide employees with free or discounted tetanus shots.
3. Identify the occupational risk of exposure to employees.
4. Educate and encourage employees to use good hygiene and infection control.
5. Identify and implement other appropriate control measures.
6. Review safety and health policies and practices.
7. Identify minimum staffing needs, position reinforcements, and essential facility operations.
8. Insure short-term disability and salary continuation programs.
9. Revise attendance and leave policies.
10. Revise vacation or paid-time-off policies.
11. Revise "no loans" and "no pay advances" policies.
12. Have a disaster and emergency communications policy and system.
13. Revise telecommuting policies.
14. Revise travel policies.

15. Allow loans and hardship withdrawals from 401(k) plans.
16. Establish an employee assistance program (EAP).
17. Engage a professional health care provider, such as a company physician or nurse.
18. Review policy statements, handbooks, contracts, insurance-related documents, and collective bargaining agreements for *force majeure* clauses.

These suggestions are just a few actions that employers should consider taking to prepare for a pandemic or similar crisis in the workforce. 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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