



# Flus, Pandemics, Paranoia and Common Sense

Insights

1.05.15

I recently read a fictional account of a 1918 flu-like pandemic which shut down basic services for an extended period. I come from a less conspiratorial perspective, but the Annapolis grad author raised some valid points and painted an all too vivid picture of how badly people might behave.

The book prompted me to critically review our library of DHS, CDC, OSHA and Fisher Phillips materials on seasonal flu precautions and Pandemic Planning. I'm a "Catastrophe Manager" and after over 500 fatality cases, I've learned that many safety programs, including Catastrophe Response are little more than paper. They have not been road tested to determine if they work. Nor have they been "practiced."

So let's "worst case it" a bit and talk about a few practical measures.

1. Washing one's hands is your single most effective anti-flu and anti-pandemic action. I carry hand sanitizer in my car and briefcase. However, let's assume that we're dealing with a truly deadly flu that easily spreads. Think critically and a bit paranoidly about possible transmission opportunities. Your newspaper was stuffed in a bag and delivered by somebody. Same for mail. What about your door knobs, steering wheel, elevator buttons, etc.? Geeze. See what I mean?

Similarly, maintaining fitness and general health is an essential component of avoiding flu and other maladies. In fact, I'm writing this post from a Lifetime Fitness gym. But think about transmission opportunities . . . I hold weights, use machines, do pushups on the floor, adjust equipment . . . and then, I touch my water bottle.

2. So my next point is to train oneself to keep one's hands away from one's face, eyes and mouths. No matter how often you wash your hands, you'll touch things which could be contaminated, and most folks will be put off if you wear a haz mat suit and treat them as carriers of a zombie plague. .

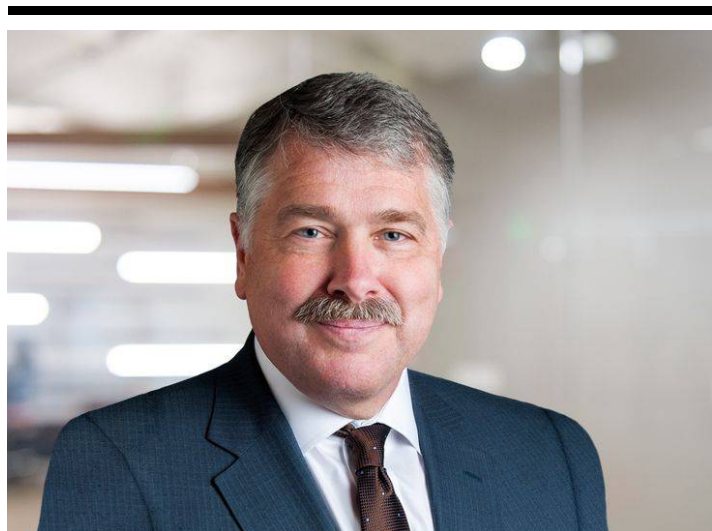
3. Most businesses maintain some sort of Business Disruption Plan, which probably includes a chapter on "Pandemic Planning." Now, pause, and consider the alarming response of parents who pulled their kids from school last year because of overstated fears of Ebola. Employers need to develop a worst case scenario about how many employees will stay home after they pull their kids from school or the schools close. Schools are breeding grounds, and even if our local, state and Federal government effectively responds, a bad flu may result in closed schools and a lot of disruption. Have you really developed a seamless process to shift employees to remote work? Have

you gone through a realistic drill or exercise to make sure that you've thought of all of the logistical, IT, confidentiality, and employment law issues? Many work cultures remain wary of remote work even where technology and customer service demands permit such work.

4. Counteract the "Anti Vac" movement. The flu vaccine planning and manufacturing process haven't advanced much from the 1960's and it's a bit of a crap shoot as to whether vaccines are prepared for the correct strains. [\(See Article\)](#) The anti-vaccination crew has redoubled their attacks this year because the vaccines apparently are not necessarily effective against the all current strains. So the Anti Vac crowd argues that we should not take the risk of a vaccination. I'm siding with the CDC, WHO, DHS and every medical professional I know, and they still recommend a flu vaccine each year. Forget political correctness. It is socially irresponsible to not get required vaccinations. That's why we've seen a resurgence of polio and other maladies in recent years. [\(See Articles\)](#) It's not much less irresponsible to refuse to get a flu vaccination unless one has a bona fide medical reason. We have seen no credible studies proving unreasonable risk, so why not get the shot?

5. Encourage realistic home planning for a disruptive pandemic. I've wrestled with this issue. I am not a survivalist or "prepper," but I've handled over 500 fatality cases and worked on security issues at government contractors and for Presidential Conventions. I understand that our power grid, just-in-time supply chain and other factors make us vulnerable to major disruption. [\(NYT article\)](#) Just look at any FBI or other Agency threat list. So far I do not believe that a 1918-like pandemic is imminent. But nor do I consider the risk to be completely negligible. [FEMA](#) and others recommend that a household keep at least two weeks of food and water available at all times, so why not take the precaution? (See also [FEMA "Make a Plan" section](#)) Even assuming no disruption of utilities, employees and their kids may choose to self-quarantine themselves for more than two weeks. As an employer, if I am anticipating employees working from home during such a period, it's in my best interest to encourage broader and more in depth preparation. There are many common sense steps short of stocking a bunker with a year's supply. I'm a former Scoutmaster and know a bit about living in the wild. Why not do a bit more home prep?

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