

PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Recent outbreaks of viruses such as *avian influenza A (H7N9)* in China, the novel coronavirus *Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV)*, and Ebola (Zaire strain) in West Africa bring to light an emerging threat that organizations globally should be prepared to address.

Unlike regional events such as hurricanes, earthquakes, or terrorist attacks, a pandemic is a recurring global event with implications at nearly every operating location. In today's interconnected economy, what may start as a localized event, can quickly spread across the country and across continents. During the past decade alone we have faced significant outbreaks of avian influenza A (H5N1), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and the "swine flu" (designated H1N1). The latter began in Mexico and spread to most countries, causing more than 18,000 deaths and disrupting travel and commerce around the world.

These outbreaks present governments and health officials with unique challenges. Properly diagnosing the viruses early can be difficult as symptoms mimic those of other ailments, as well as each other. Often the source of new strains are difficult to identify, making control efforts challenging. Furthermore, if a virus has never been seen in humans before, there are no existing preventative treatments in place. Even for "known viruses" such as Ebola, often there is no vaccine nor a specific course of treatment.

The uncertainty that often surrounds the origin, diagnosis, severity, and transmission of viruses further underscores the critical importance of effective pandemic planning and response in order to minimize exposure to, and the negative impacts from, potential pandemic threats.

Consider these questions:

- Has my organization established health procedures to protect staff working in or traveling to affected areas?
- Is my organization equipped to operate with the majority of staff working from home or other remote locations?
- What policies and procedures does my organization need to put in place to address supply disruptions and maintain operations should my organization or my supplier organizations become short-staffed?

The answers to these and related questions will give you an indication of your organization's current level of preparedness and may suggest areas where you need to update your planning.

HOW MARSH RISK CONSULTING CAN HELP

Marsh Risk Consulting's (MRC) Reputational Risk & Crisis Management, Resiliency, and Response Practice has the experience and resources to help you develop and, if necessary, implement a tailored Pandemic Response Plan as events unfold.

PANDEMIC RESPONSE PLAN

We will work with you to develop a Pandemic Response Plan that: (1) integrates with existing crisis management, emergency response, and continuity plans; and (2) maps to the operational and cultural requirements of your organization.

In terms of pandemic preparedness, our team will work with you to:

- Validate current pandemic preparedness and management plans and procedures.
- Define or integrate plans within an existing overall crisis management structure and process to guide rapid and coordinated decision making at appropriate levels of the organization.
- Develop the necessary policies and processes to support pandemic response efforts in relation to:

- What should our attendance policy be?
 - Should employees come to work if a family member is sick?
 - What additional cleaning and precautions are necessary?
 - Are we willing and prepared to screen employees before they are allowed into the workplace?
 - Will we encourage employees to use personal protective equipment – masks and gloves? What kind of training is required? Do we have enough stock and resources?
 - How are we tracking outbreaks globally? How does this affect our travel policy?
- Orchestrate and align all related incident response plans, including business continuity, emergency response, supply chain, communications, human impact, and others.
 - Train personnel to help ensure the effective execution of the plan as circumstances dictate.

If needed, we can also help your organization develop a broad-based overarching Crisis Management Plan designed to address not just pandemic risk, but an array of events – human, environmental, political, physical, financial, legal, or regulatory – that can affect your employees, your continued operations, and the reputation of your organization.

The ability to plan successfully for a crisis and mitigate the impacts on your business is the result of a full understanding of risks, comprehensive planning, regular training and exercises, and a strategy for maintaining these capabilities over time.



REAL-TIME CONSULTING

Your organization and its reputation are at greatest risk during a crisis situation. We not only help your organization define its risks and plan for a crisis such as a pandemic, we also offer real-time support when you find yourself affected by an event.

Our senior consultants successfully supported organizations across all industries during the previous pandemic events, and are available around-the-clock to provide guidance and counsel to senior leaders to help them effectively respond to and manage the crisis. For example:

- *National Food Distributor* – Our team helped a food distributor update previous pandemic plans to meet the emerging H1N1 threat. As part of this effort, we helped the organization define corporate policies and processes that were then implemented across more than 700 operating locations. Our team provided on the ground support which included scheduling/facilitating regular crisis management meetings, developing executive-level updates, and ongoing situation monitoring.
- *Global Manufacturing and Services Company* – With operations in every region of the world, this client required a pandemic response program that was structured around corporate guidance, recommendations, and policy development, but that could be implemented locally by regional and country managers. Our team helped this client develop a Pandemic Response Plan that was integrated with its existing crisis management and response process. Further, we developed numerous policy and guidance documents around topics such as attendance policies, social distancing, self quarantine, employee screening, and workplace precautions.



PANDEMICS, EPIDEMICS, AND WIDESPREAD OUTBREAKS OF THE LAST CENTURY

While the WHO, US Centers for Disease Control, and other health organizations and governments have established differing pandemic “phases” to classify widespread outbreaks, pandemic is generally defined as an epidemic that becomes very widespread and affects a whole region, a continent, or the world.

Past pandemics of note include:

2009-2010: Influenza A (H1N1), commonly known as swine flu, infected as many as 576,000 people worldwide and resulted in more than 18,000 deaths.

2003: Avian influenza A (H5N1) emerged from Southern China. Though not officially designated a pandemic, the virus spread to 15 countries in Asia and the Middle East. The WHO confirmed 628 human cases, resulting in 374 deaths.

2003: According to the WHO, there were nearly 8,100 probable cases of SARS reported in 29 countries before the outbreak was contained by the end of the year. Worldwide, 774 people died.

1977-1978: Dubbed the “Russian Flu,” a version of the H1N1 strain primarily affected people born after 1950 who had not developed anti-bodies following an outbreak of a similar strain a few decades earlier.

1968-1969: A strain of influenza A (H3N2), originating in the Hong Kong area, went on to kill an estimated one million people worldwide.

1957-1958: The “Asian Flu” originated in ducks and combined with a pre-existing human flu strain. First seen in Guizhou, China, it spread to Singapore, Hong Kong, and then the US, where the death toll reached approximately 70,000. It is estimated that one to four million deaths occurred worldwide.

1918-1920: The “Spanish Flu,” as it is commonly known, was a Category 5 pandemic caused by an unusually severe strain of the H1N1 virus. It was seen in every country, even the Arctic and remote island nations. Fatality estimates vary, but as many as 50-100 million people, mostly young adults, were said to have perished.

MARSH RISK CONSULTING

For more information about pandemic and other solutions from Marsh Risk Consulting, visit marshriskconsulting.com, or contact your local MRC or Marsh representative.

You can also contact our experts directly:

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