Toronto Public Health Pandemic Plan
A Planning Guide for Businesses

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Disclaimer: This Planning Guide is a tool to support planning for pandemic in the business sector. Toronto Public Health is not responsible for any misinterpretation or misuse of this guide.

1.0 Introduction

Toronto Public Health (TPH) has prepared a number of planning guides to assist community partners in developing their own pandemic plans. The guides are intended to be used as planning tools. All agencies, organizations and other partners should use these tools alongside the specific advice provided by federal, provincial and local authorities during an actual pandemic situation.

1.1 Purpose of this guide

This general planning guide identifies issues and critical elements of emergency preparedness that businesses should consider in planning for a pandemic. Although TPH will identify broad public health issues, every organization must plan for the specific disruptions it will face during a pandemic.

The overall goal of pandemic planning is to reduce illness (morbidity), death (mortality), and social disruption resulting from a pandemic. Although this guide identifies specific issues associated with a pandemic, much of the information applies to other emergencies as well.

The business planning guide is an evolving document and as planning continues at the federal, provincial and local levels, updated information will be added.

2.0 Businesses – Specific Issues

2.1 Staff absenteeism

Determine how you will operate if staff absenteeism spikes resulting from those who must stay home to watch their children due to school or childcare closures, or to care for sick family members. Businesses and other employers should prepare to institute flexible workplace and leave policies for these staff.

2.2 Actively encourage sick staff to stay home

Staff who have symptoms of respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not go to work. Specific guidance on how long to remain at home will be communicated at the time of a pandemic. Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.

Businesses should be flexible with requiring healthcare provider's notes for staff who are sick with respiratory illness. Healthcare provider notes to validate staff illness or to return to work can put unnecessary strain on healthcare provider offices and medical facilities during this busy time.

Businesses should maintain flexible policies that permit staff to stay home to care for a sick family member. During this time, employers should be aware that more staff may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members.

2.3 Ill at Work

Staff who appear to have symptoms of respiratory illness (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work and staff who become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and sent home immediately.

2.4 Travel

During a pandemic, the federal government or international governments may impose travel restrictions to delay the spread of the virus to other areas. This may prevent out-of-province and international travel. Check the Public Health Agency of Canada's travel advisories for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which you plan to travel https://travel.gc.ca/.

2.5 Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is an important element of infection control in all businesses. During a pandemic, hand hygiene should be reinforced and practiced by staff and visitors.

Hand hygiene posters should be posted at the entrance and in areas where they are likely to be seen to remind staff and visitors to practice hand hygiene frequently.

Washing hands with plain soap and water is recommended in businesses as the mechanical action is effective at removing visible soil as well as microbes. In instances where hand washing sinks are not available, use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers (ABHS) should be considered. If hands are visibly soiled, alcohol-based hand sanitizers may not be effective at eliminating respiratory viruses. It is recommended that in addition to existing sinks, increased numbers of hand sanitizing stations (e.g. wall mounted hand sanitizer dispensers) as well as tissues and waste receptacles be provided. Businesses should consider:
- Making additional tissue supplies and waste receptacles available
- If ABHS are provided to supplement hand washing facilities, secured dispensers should be placed in supervised areas

2.6 Respiratory etiquette

To prevent the spread of respiratory infections, proper respiratory etiquette should be practiced by staff and visitors. Respiratory etiquette posters should be posted at the entrance and in areas where they are likely to be seen to remind staff and visitors to practice proper respiratory etiquette.

Respiratory etiquette includes:
- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with a tissue or by turning your head away from others and sneezing or coughing into your sleeve or elbow
- Disposing of used tissues into the garbage immediately after use
- Practicing proper hand hygiene immediately after coughing or sneezing

2.7 Cleaning

Regular cleaning and disinfecting of objects and high-touch surfaces will help to prevent the transmission of viruses from contaminated objects and surfaces.
Increased monitoring of hand cleaning supplies is also recommended to ensure all sinks in washrooms, and kitchens are well stocked with hand washing supplies at all times (i.e., soap and paper towels).

Operators are encouraged to review existing activities and practices within their settings to help determine where enhancements or increased cleaning frequencies may be recommended.

High-Touch Surfaces

High-Touch Surfaces may include doorknobs, elevator buttons, light switches and computer keyboards that are touched frequently with hands throughout the day. High-touch surfaces require frequent cleaning and disinfection at least daily, and more frequently where the risk of contamination is higher than usual (e.g., if there is increase in illness at the site).

Cleaning Products

Cleaning with water and household detergents and use of common disinfectant products should be sufficient for cleaning and disinfection. If household or commercial disinfectant cleaning products are not readily available, hard surfaces can be disinfected using a mixture of 1-part bleach (5% sodium hypochlorite) and 9 parts water, ensuring the dilute solution makes contact with the surface for one minute for disinfection.

3.0 Planning Checklist

3.1 Planning checklist - short version

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No	Comments
Does your organization have an emergency plan?		
Have you made your staff aware of emergency response plans?		
Have you identified which tasks and positions would be essential during an emergency?		
Have you considered alternative strategies on how to continue service delivery when normal methods are disrupted?		
Have you developed a business continuity plan for your organization for decreasing or altering the services that you offer?		
Have you considered how to keep your organization operational with a large number of staff ill and unable to work?		
Do you have a mechanism to monitor increases in staff absenteeism?		
Have you considered how to deal with staff who report to work ill?		
Do you know where to get up-to-date and accurate information about the virus and the pandemic?		

Have you trained your staff on proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette?		
Is your cleaning staff aware of proper disinfecting techniques during a pandemic?		
Have you considered stockpiling necessary supplies?		
In case of a death on-site, do you know who to contact (ambulance, coroner, funeral home)?		
Have you considered how you would communicate information to your staff and clients in an efficient manner?		
Have you considered how you would provide your staff with support and counseling?		

3.2 Planning checklist - long version

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable	COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process
Activation/Termination of Pandemic Flu Response Plan		
Who has responsibility for activating the business continuity plan for your organization and who is that person's back-up?		
Has your organization identified a process through which the decision will be made to activate and terminate the plan?		
Do you have a communication strategy for reaching staff and service partners as a result of having to implement any section of the business continuity plan?		
Decision-making and Reporting		
Who needs to approve the Pandemic Response Plan?		
Who is identified as being in charge in the event of a pandemic and are the roles of the various stakeholders clearly defined?		
Who makes what decisions?		
Agencies and Stakeholder Communications		
Do you have a list of all relevant agencies and stakeholders and their contact information?		
Who notifies the various stakeholders?		

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable	COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process
Communications with Staff and the General Public		
Who will be responsible for communicating to the staff in your organization and who is their back up person(s) to assume this responsibility?		
Have you prepared site-specific notification for closures and contacts for the public?		
Who will be responsible for communicating with the general public?		
How will reduction/temporary termination of regular services be communicated to local stakeholders and the public?		
Who has authority to issue public service announcements/news releases and who is their alternate?		
How fast can these announcements be produced and approved?		
If mail service is interrupted, is there critical mail delivery which you need to make alternative arrangements for?		
Do you know where to get up-to-date and accurate information about the virus and the pandemic? ▪ Vaccine and antiviral medications information ▪ Infection control ▪ Personal care ▪ Public health measures		

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable	COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process
Planning		
Who is in charge in the event of a pandemic episode and are the roles of the various stakeholders clearly defined? Who makes what decisions? Who notifies the various stakeholders?		
Who do you need input from both internally and externally to prepare and review a business continuity plan for your organization? ▪ Elected officials ▪ Legal counsel ▪ Community partners ▪ Labour unions and bargaining agents		
Who needs to approve the business continuity plan?		
Is the business continuity plan integrated with your emergency preparedness plan(s)?		
What is the staff capacity and are there provisions to bring in additional staff or volunteers?		
Have you identified the key services that must be provided? (Note: consider minor to major lack of availability of staff due to illness)		
Has your organization identified possible key functions, staff positions, and supplies for each key service?		

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable	COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process
Testing of the Plan		
How will you test and/or evaluate your business continuity plan?		
How will you test your communication systems, e.g., fan-out?		
Training and Orientation		
What are your training needs for staff and external stakeholders regarding - infection control measures? - environmental cleaning? - equipment use? review of your organization's business continuity plan, including explanation of roles and responsibilities?		
What additional training will volunteers and reassigned staff require?		
Educational Materials		
Have educational materials been prepared?		
Have public education efforts been planned?		
Human Resources		
Is there a list of all staff, complete with telephone numbers (home and business) and job titles (including those recently retired)?		
Does your organization maintain a fan-out list to contact staff?		
Is there a contact list of all senior staff within your organization?		

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable	COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process
If public transit becomes a problem, can staff arrange alternate forms of transportation to work, e.g., carpooling?		
Has your organization addressed the issue of staff being unable to report to work due to possible school and daycare closures?		
Do you currently have adequate staffing for regular day-to-day function?		
Do you have a mechanism to monitor increases in staff absenteeism?		
Has your organization prepared an inventory of skills and professional competencies in the event that people from your organization are required to perform duties/functions in other areas to maintain essential services?		
How has your organization planned to maintain the staff payroll?		
Health and Safety		
Is there a copy of the Health and Safety manual on site in your organization?		
Have insurance and union issues been addressed?		
Has an inventory been prepared for specialized equipment/facilities that may be needed during a pandemic?		
Have liability issues been addressed for volunteers and re-assigned staff?		
Have support care services been planned for staff? ▪ Psychosocial support ▪ Grief counselling		

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable	COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process
Materials and Supplies		
Are there clearly stated policies and procedures that cover signing authority and acquisitions?		
Is there a mechanism that will ensure that additional equipment (e.g., cell phones, refrigerators, etc.) can be obtained with minimum delay?		
Who has authority for ordering repair/replacement for equipment and who is their alternate?		
Have you considered developing a 6-8-week stockpile of critical supplies required to maintain your "must do" services, and stockpile of infection control supplies (e.g., alcohol-based hand sanitizers, tissues)?		
Does your organization have contact lists for all your suppliers and alternate suppliers?		
Has a recovery phase been planned for (e.g., depleted supplies or backlogs)?		
Documentation and Record Keeping		
Has your organization developed appropriate record keeping procedures for such items as: ▪ complaints and issues raised ▪ significant decisions that were made ▪ regular reporting to provincial/federal governments as required		

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable	COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process
Are there people in your organization who have sole access to incoming information (e.g., reports, complaints, etc.) and who are their alternates?		

Information and Technology

Does your organization maintain a central inventory of passwords to office equipment and electronic files?		
If your information and technology person is ill, who is their alternate?		
Does your organization have access to inventory (including serial numbers) of all computer equipment, printers, fax machines, photocopiers in case repairs are needed?		
Does your organization have contact lists for all equipment repair persons?		
Does your organization have the staff and equipment for a website/telephone call-in line to update staff and clients?		

Facilities

Could any of the organization's services be provided from another work location or from home?		
If necessary, could staff live at the work location or alternative work location for some period of time?		

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable	COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process
Who is your security contact should there be a problem with physical access to your work location and who is their alternate?		
How are courier packages generally sent out and received?		
Who is your security contact should there be a problem with physical access to your work location and who is their alternate?		
How are courier packages generally sent out and received?		

Procurement of Additional Resources

Who has the responsibility for procurement matters (e.g., ordering resources and/or equipment) during a pandemic?		
Who will be responsible for payment issues related to overtime and/or additional salary issues and who is their alternate?		
Who has the authority to hire contract/temporary workers and to take on volunteers and who is their alternate?		
Is there a pre-approval process in place for purchasing additional supplies? If not, how long does it take for the approval process?		

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable	COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process

Post Pandemic

What are the immediate lessons learned from the previous wave when planning for multiple pandemic waves?		
Who will be responsible for evaluating your response to the pandemic?		
What factors should be included in the evaluation?		
Who will have the authority to notify the various staff, clients and stakeholders regarding the organization's return to full service?		
Who will decide to reinstate full service?		