



Australian Government

# PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

## BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND PANDEMIC PLANNING

(FOR NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS)

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This document aims to assist non-government organisations better prepare for a potential human influenza pandemic in Australia. It draws on a number of already published sources in Australia and overseas and is the result of community and government consultation.

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Organisations should refer to HB292–2006 Handbook *A Practitioners guide to business continuity management* published by Standards Australia (ISBN 0 7337 7472 5) for more information.

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## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>About Pandemic Influenza</b>	<b>2</b>
Why is bird flu a concern?	2
What do you need to know about pandemic influenza?	2
How could an influenza pandemic affect your organisation?	2
How is the Australian Government preparing for an influenza pandemic?	3
National Action Plan for Human Influenza Pandemic	3
Who will tell you if there is an influenza pandemic?	4
<b>Business Continuity Planning and Resilience</b>	<b>5</b>
Why plan NOW for a pandemic	5
Essential community services	5
Non-essential community services	5
<b>Seven Key Steps in Planning</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Tips to Help Protect your Staff, Volunteers and Clients</b>	<b>9</b>
Hand washing	9
Coughing and sneezing	9
Personal protective equipment	9
<b>A Case Study</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>More Information</b>	<b>12</b>

## Introduction

This kit has been developed to assist you in preparing your organisation for a potential human influenza pandemic. The kit will help you understand what a human influenza pandemic is. It explains the impact a pandemic could have on your organisation, the community and the provision of services, and how important it is to have a plan in place to help your organisation cope.

It provides some practical tools and information to assist you in thinking about and developing your pandemic plan.

Experience has shown that preparedness is key to organisational and community recovery from the impacts of disasters, so investing in preparations now will pay off in the future.

## About Pandemic Influenza

### Why is bird flu a concern?

Bird flu, also known as ‘avian influenza’ is caused by a virus that affects wild birds and domestic poultry like chickens, ducks and geese. The bird flu virus could mutate into a form that is easily transmitted among humans. When this occurs a human influenza pandemic virus is created.

The current bird flu strain, H5N1, occurring overseas has been responsible for a high death rate in bird populations. Isolated cases of the H5N1 virus infecting and causing illness and death in humans have also been reported. These cases have predominantly arisen from close contact between humans and infected domestic birds, but there is no current evidence of efficient human-to-human transmission.

Scientists and health professionals, however, warn that while the H5N1 bird flu virus is circulating in the bird population there is potential for a human pandemic influenza to develop. This is the eventuality that governments, the World Health Organisation (WHO), medical experts and others are preparing for through a number of measures.

### What do you need to know about pandemic influenza?

An influenza pandemic is a disease outbreak that occurs when:

- A new strain of influenza virus emerges to which no-one is immune
- The virus causes disease in humans
- The virus is spread easily between humans.

In the absence of immunity, a new influenza strain could spread rapidly, causing epidemics or pandemics, infecting large numbers of people with possibly fatal results.

A pandemic or worldwide outbreak of a new influenza virus has the potential to infect 25–30 per cent of the world’s population. WHO warns an influenza pandemic will be unlike any disaster we have experienced in recent times. It will arise quickly and may occur in several waves; lasting several months or more.

### How could an influenza pandemic affect your organisation?

If it occurs, a human influenza pandemic is likely to have significant impacts on all organisations, including:

- Diminished resources—health care services may not be able to provide direct care in some cases. There may also be very high staff and volunteer absence rates for some periods during the pandemic
- Reduced capacity to respond—a pandemic could have direct effects such as high staff absenteeism, and indirect effects such as the closure of schools and child care centres. At the peak of the pandemic, between 30 and 50 per cent of staff and volunteers may be absent from work due to illness, fear of contamination, caring responsibilities or restrictions on movement
- Changes in demand—demand could increase for some community services for both existing clients and new client groups. Demands for other services may reduce
- Higher levels of uncertainty, fear and anxiety—these would be expected to be much higher during a pandemic because of people’s concerns about the risk of infection to themselves and their families
- Prolonged duration of the impact—most emergencies are short and contained. A pandemic may, however, last for several months.

In the event of a pandemic, it is likely that small organisations with limited resources will particularly feel the impact. Even the loss of a few key employees, volunteers or suppliers has the potential to cause major disruptions to an organisation’s ability to function.

With these factors in mind, non-government organisations need to develop business continuity plans and to work closely with local government to manage the effects. Additional pressure may be felt by organisations in rural and remote communities due to isolation and limited resources.

## How is the Australian Government preparing for an influenza pandemic?

Australia is well prepared to respond to an influenza pandemic. The Australian Government is constantly monitoring the situation overseas in conjunction with international agencies and health experts.

The Australian Government's health approach to managing an influenza pandemic in Australia is available in the *Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza*, prepared by the Department of Health and Ageing. The plan contains information about what the Australian Government is doing to prepare for a pandemic.

If an influenza pandemic occurs overseas, border control measures will be implemented to delay the spread of the pandemic to Australia for as long as possible. Comprehensive disease control plans are in place in the event that the pandemic reaches Australia. The Department of Health and Ageing maintains surveillance networks so that diseases can be identified quickly. There is also a national stockpile of medicines and equipment that could be used to reduce the spread of the virus. Increased laboratory capacity and contractual arrangements are in place with manufacturers to ensure Australia has access to a vaccine once one is developed.

## National Action Plan for Human Influenza Pandemic

*The National Action Plan for Human Influenza Pandemic* has been developed in cooperation with the Australian Government, state and territory and local governments. This plan outlines how all levels of government will work together to protect Australia against the threat of an influenza pandemic and support the Australian community should one occur. More information is available on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet website [www.pmc.gov.au](http://www.pmc.gov.au)

The Australian Government is also working closely with neighbouring countries in an effort to slow the spread of a pandemic overseas. The likelihood of an influenza pandemic reaching our shores is closely monitored through liaison with WHO and other governments.

The Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) is responsible for addressing and responding to the potential social and community impacts of an influenza pandemic. This includes providing information to non-government organisations to support the ongoing provision of services to the community in the event of a pandemic.

## Who will tell you if there is an influenza pandemic?

The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing has prepared a comprehensive communication strategy for informing and advising the general public, businesses and key health stakeholders, should a pandemic develop.

Information will also be available through state and territory government websites. These organisations have an essential role in pandemic preparedness and will be key sources of information and assistance in the event of an influenza pandemic.

In the event of an influenza pandemic, health officials will be responsible for issuing information and warnings to the public. These will be released through the media and official websites.

The Department of Health and Ageing Communicable Disease hotline will provide a free call telephone information service 1800 004 599. Information about Australian Government assistance will be available at [www.disasterassist.gov.au](http://www.disasterassist.gov.au). State and territory health departments will also provide information about local arrangements in their state/territory.

# Business Continuity Planning and Resilience

## Why plan NOW for a pandemic?

Every organisation will benefit from a business continuity plan to improve their organisational and community resilience to adverse events such as natural disasters, terrorist threats, human error, product recall or an influenza pandemic. A business continuity plan provides an opportunity to not only plan for, respond to, and recover from specific events, but to develop more robust operational processes to improve overall business operations and processes.

To ensure that you are prepared to meet the challenge of a pandemic, it is vital that you plan and prepare in advance for such an event. Developing a business continuity plan now will help you and your organisation, if a pandemic occurs, and will assist you in the recovery phase.

In the lead up to, and during a pandemic, your staff and volunteers will likely be concerned about, and preoccupied with, the well-being of their families. Their commitment or ability to work may not be their primary concern. Staff, volunteers and clients will likely feel reassured by your pandemic planning activities and will be pleased to know you are thinking ahead and preparing as best you can.

Unlike most disasters that are short, sharp and localised, a pandemic will be widespread, last for several months and come in waves. You can expect that at the peak of a pandemic, between 30 and 50 per cent of staff and volunteers to be absent from work due to illness, fear of contamination, caring responsibilities or restrictions of movement. As more people become ill, absenteeism will increase. This will have a profound effect on your organisation and its ability to continue operating, especially at a time when the particular services your organisation provides may be in even greater demand.

## Essential community services

If your organisation provides essential community services, it is important that you have arrangements in place to enable it to continue to deliver these services as best you can. This might be developing flexible approaches to deliver your services while subject to limitations such as restriction of movement and disruptions to supplies. These pre-organised arrangements will help minimise disruptions to services to some of the most vulnerable people in the community, and assist overall community recovery.

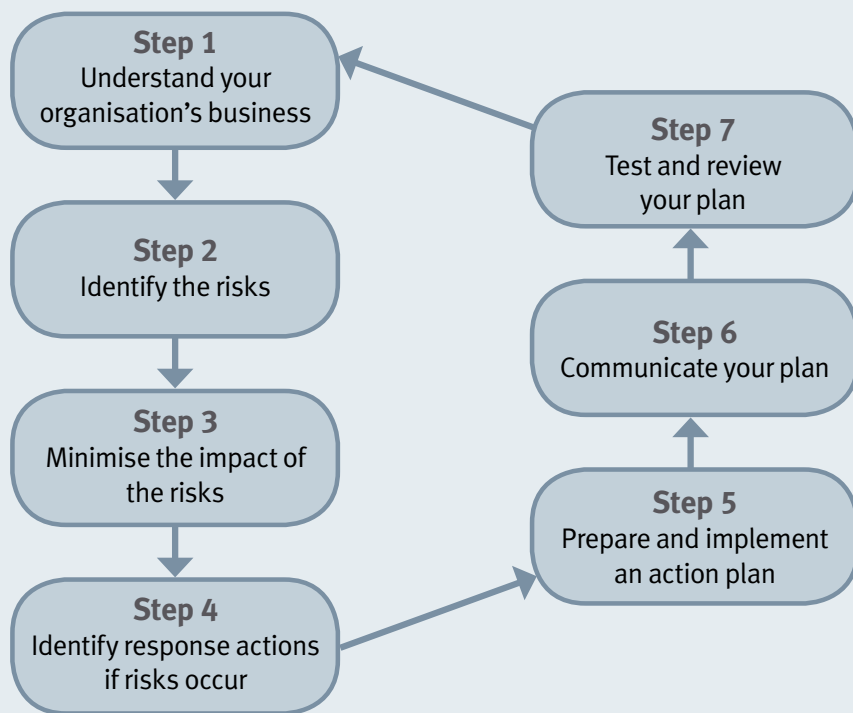
## Non-essential community services

Organisations not providing essential services may need to consider and plan for scaling down operations or closing for a period of time, or alternatively supporting other organisations that provide essential community services.

## Seven Key Steps in Planning

### Seven steps towards business continuity and organisational resilience

When your organisation is facing a crisis, there are a number of common questions and actions that should be considered, regardless of the type of incident. The following flow chart and steps detail the processes an organisation might take in developing a business continuity plan and organisational resilience.



## Step 1

### Understand your organisation's business

- Identify your key business activities/services and rank them in order of importance
  - Importance should be assessed in terms of ability to meet your organisation's objectives
  - The importance of activities may differ at various times during the year
- Distinguish between essential and non-essential activities/services
- Identify individuals who deliver essential activities/services.

## Step 2

### What are the risks to your organisation?

- Consider the things that might impact on your organisation's ability to meet its objectives (e.g. pandemic influenza, fire, flood, storms, product recall, sabotage, terrorism, explosion, vehicle accident, etc.)
- How likely is it that these risks will occur?
- What impacts will the risk events have on your organisation, if they do occur?
- Will they also affect others in the community – your suppliers, your customers/clients, other community organisations?
- If so who will be affected and how?

## Step 3

### What actions can you take to reduce the risk or its impact before it occurs?

- Can you control the risk?
- Can you put arrangements in place to reduce the impact, even if the risk event does occur (e.g. if the risk is fire, you could store all key documents in a fire proof safe)?
- What level of risk are you willing to accept?

## Step 4

### What response actions can you take if the risk occurs?

- How would you respond immediately?
- What would you need to do within the first day, week, or month?
- Who is responsible for which key tasks?
- What activities could you put on hold?
- Could you gain assistance from other community organisations or could you help them?

## Step 5

### **Prepare and implement an action plan**

- Prepare for all the actions you identified in Step 4
- Document your plan and procedures to ensure those employees available know what to do
- Use checklists and quick reference guides, and have these handy, if needed (at home and at work)
- Set up teams and list their responsibilities
- Your action plan will help you test your arrangements.

## Step 6

### **Tell your staff and customers/clients about your plan**

- Communicate your plan to staff and volunteers and others who would benefit from knowing
- Share your plan with other community organisations.

## Step 7

### **Test and review your plan**

- Review your environment to see if there are any new risks or if there are any new ways to reduce the impact of existing risks (e.g. new software developed to protect your IT system)
- Have your organisation's key activities changed?
- Testing your plan will help identify if you have overlooked anything in your planning. It will also let you know if your action plan is practical and will help ensure your employees are aware of what they need to do.

# Tips to Help Protect Your Staff, Volunteers and Clients

Influenza is caused by a virus and is generally spread from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Undertaking infection control measures is one of the best ways to minimise infection spread. These simple, common sense practices will help you, your employees and volunteers reduce influenza infection.

## Hand washing

- Adopt hygienic hand washing practices, particularly after coughing, sneezing or using tissues
- Keep hands away from the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose, and mouth
- Ensure adequate supplies of hand hygiene products are available. This should be a high planning priority as there may be interruption to the supply or shortages of soap and disposable hand towels during a pandemic
- Consider installing conveniently located dispensers of alcohol-based hand rub
- Have a supply of tissues available and provide no-touch receptacles for used tissue disposal
- Provide soap and disposable towels for hand washing near sinks.

## Coughing and sneezing

- Cover nose and mouth when sneezing and coughing (preferably with a disposable single use tissue)
- Dispose of tissues in the nearest waste receptacle after use. Do not store them in your pockets
- Wash your hands after coughing, sneezing or touching used tissues.

## Personal protective equipment

- Health authorities will provide guidance on appropriate equipment. The most commonly used equipment would be masks and protective barriers
- Disposable surgical masks worn by those who are ill will help prevent exposing others to respiratory secretions. Dispose of masks as soon as they become moist or after coughing or sneezing, and wash your hands thoroughly
- Keeping at least one metre apart from others will reduce the spread of the virus, as airborne particles do not generally carry beyond this distance
- Protective barriers such as perspex or glass may provide useful protection for people such as front counter staff, who have frequent face-to-face contact with members of the public where one metre separation is not practical.

## A Case Study

### UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide Inc. Business Continuity Planning Case Study

In early 2006, UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide Inc. (UCW Adelaide) recognised the need to prepare for the possible impacts of an influenza pandemic or sustained disease outbreak. UCW Adelaide initially based its planning on information on the internet, and then developed plans that uniquely suited UCW Adelaide.

UCW Adelaide originally thought it could simply 'fill in' a continuity planning template. Instead, it found that developing an organisational continuity plan was a very interactive process.

In developing its business continuity plan, UCW Adelaide took the following steps to ensure it is prepared for the impact of a human influenza pandemic.

#### 1. Planning in phases

To help think about which activities might be necessary during a pandemic, UCW Adelaide developed a series of phases and considered the activities that should occur in each phase:

- Build up phase (prior to a pandemic alert)
- Alert phase (when a pandemic is imminent)
- Active phase (when the pandemic is having an effect)
- Recovery (trying to get back to normal).

#### 2. Reviewing all programs

UCW Adelaide reviewed all its programs to determine which it would continue to operate and which could stop during a pandemic. It considered this in the context of a number of scenarios of different duration (i.e. days, weeks or in a number of waves). It also considered a scenario where it was significantly affected and another that had minimal effect.

From these scenarios UCW Adelaide concluded:

- Some activities were needed (e.g. raising standards of hygiene) and there were many ways of achieving this (e.g. hand washing instructions in bathrooms, replacing linen towels with paper towels, developing cleaning specifications for all working sites, regardless of who is doing the cleaning)
- It would be beneficial to eliminate some risks to the organisation now by introducing hygiene arrangements gently, increasing these as the need arises.

In undertaking this review, UCW Adelaide considered the relevant legislation.

### 3. Considering their financial position

UCW Adelaide is undertaking activities to ensure continued funding will be available to it in a pandemic. These activities include:

- Discussing with funding organisations how funding might be affected under contractual arrangements if services are unable to be delivered
- Discussing with their bank about the length of time they would be prepared to continue financing the organisation in the event that electronic fund transfer deposits were not working
- Reviewing insurance coverage to ensure it was covered for key risks in a pandemic
- Examining contracts with both government and clients and identifying where any modifications might be needed. For example, including a clause with personal care services that allows them to vary the hours of care provided in a crisis.

## 4. Pandemic management and staff wellbeing

UCW Adelaide has appointed a Pandemic Manager and is putting a number of arrangements in place to manage staffing issues, including:

- Deciding to pay all staff four weeks sick leave if they are ill
- Developing care plans for vulnerable staff and clients, for example identifying staff who are single parents, and understanding their support needs
- Upgrading staff contact details through the human resources area, actively checking and re-confirming the accuracy of telephone, email, mobile and street address information. This will allow the organisation to follow up with and support staff, ensuring important information reaches them
- Working on how to manage ill staff, including a policy to send ill employees and staff home and monitoring staff who have been sent home to ensure they return to work as soon as they are well, while ensuring uninfected staff will not be exposed to unsafe working conditions
- Identifying staff with specialised training or skills. For example, there may be staff with some medical training that could assist in some way
- Keeping staff informed about the spread of the virus overseas and of any cases in Australia, should they occur
- Identifying (with sensitivity) staff that may be particularly vulnerable, for example those who have experienced previous trauma
- Providing counselling for those who need it, rather than for everybody.

## 5. Staff management and training

By altering the usual authority and delegation levels, UCW Adelaide is providing more staff with the appropriate authority to take action and make decisions when other staff may be sick. In addition, it plans to cross-train staff on a range of functions.

## 6. Service delivery

UCW Adelaide is considering alternative ways of service delivery to minimise contact, such as moving from face-to-face to telephone or web based support, where possible.

## 7. Communication

The development of an internal communication strategy will ensure that staff is kept well-informed about any cases of the virus and its spread. This will involve regular announcements from the CEO and, if necessary, information will be printed and hand delivered to staff if there is a break down in electronic forms of communication.

## 8. Recovery

During recovery, the ultimate aim will be for the organisation to return to normal as soon as possible. Reputation management will be important for UCW during a pandemic and non-government organisations will need to work together. UCW Adelaide has identified a number of questions they need to ask in preparation for the recovery effort:

- If there is a 5–10 per cent drop in gross domestic product as some observers are indicating, then what will the flow on effects be?
- Will it continue to receive government funding for its services?
- How easy would it be to take out loans to replace or build up businesses?
- What would be the impact on donations and fundraising?

UCW Adelaide acknowledges the importance of recovery and planning is ongoing.

## More Information

### Australian Government

**Department of Families, Housing,  
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**  
[www.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au)

**Department of the Prime Minister and  
Cabinet – National Action Plan for Human  
Pandemic influenza**  
[www.pmc.gov.au/publications/pandemic](http://www.pmc.gov.au/publications/pandemic)

**Department of Innovation, Industry, Science  
and Research – A Business Continuity Guide  
for Australian Businesses**  
[www.industry.gov.au/  
pandemicbusinesscontinuity](http://www.industry.gov.au/pandemicbusinesscontinuity)

**Department of Health and Ageing**  
[www.health.gov.au/pandemic](http://www.health.gov.au/pandemic)

**Disaster Assist – information about  
Australian Government recovery assistance**  
[www.disasterassist.gov.au](http://www.disasterassist.gov.au)

**Health Services Australia**  
[www.avianinfluenza.com.au](http://www.avianinfluenza.com.au)

**Department of Agriculture,  
Fisheries and Forestry**  
[www.daff.gov.au](http://www.daff.gov.au)

**Comcare**  
[www.comcare.gov.au](http://www.comcare.gov.au)

**Emergency Management Australia**  
[www.ema.gov.au](http://www.ema.gov.au)

**Australian Local Government Association  
– Emergency management**  
[www.alga.asn.au/policy/emergman](http://www.alga.asn.au/policy/emergman)

### State and Territory Government Pandemic Planning

**New South Wales**  
[www.health.nsw.gov.au/pandemic/  
planning.html](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pandemic/planning.html)

**Victoria**  
[www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/regulations/  
vic\\_influenza](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/regulations/vic_influenza)

**Queensland**  
[http://www.qld.gov.au/services\\_for\\_  
queenslanders/](http://www.qld.gov.au/services_for_queenslanders/)

**South Australia**  
[http://www.health.sa.gov.au/  
pandemicinfluenza/](http://www.health.sa.gov.au/pandemicinfluenza/)

**Western Australia**  
[www.health.wa.gov.au/disaster/  
pandemic\\_influenza](http://www.health.wa.gov.au/disaster/pandemic_influenza)  
[www.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.dpc.wa.gov.au)

**Tasmania**  
[www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/healthyliving/pandemic](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/healthyliving/pandemic)

**Northern Territory**  
[www.nt.gov.au/health](http://www.nt.gov.au/health)

**Australian Capital Territory**  
[www.health.act.gov.au/c/health](http://www.health.act.gov.au/c/health)

### International

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

**World Health Organization**  
[www.who.int](http://www.who.int)



