

PANDEMIC INFLUENZA CONTINGENCY
UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS



**39 STEPS GOVERNMENTS SHOULD TAKE
TO PREPARE FOR A PANDEMIC**

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Experts at WHO believe the world is closer to an influenza pandemic than at any time since 1968. Experience with HIV/AIDS, malaria, SARS and previous influenza pandemics demonstrates that robust multi-sector support is needed to limit vulnerability and humanitarian consequences. Outbreaks of highly transmissible disease with high fatality rates are liable to trigger (through absenteeism) extreme adverse economic, governance, humanitarian and social impacts, including civil disruption, collapse of weak safety nets and impoverishment of vulnerable populations. Countries need to prepare adequately for the economic and social impacts of a pandemic. Minimising the disruption of vital services by planning for continuity of operations is of paramount importance.

This paper sets out a number of key actions which Governments and their partners should consider implementing in order to mitigate the ‘beyond health’ impacts of a pandemic.

A. Central Government planning and coordination

- 1) Pandemic preparedness should be integrated into national disaster management structures and approaches. An existing Government entity that is responsible for crisis management should coordinate the national response.
- 2) The roles and responsibilities of different Government entities and the command structure should be explicit.
- 3) A cross-Government Ministerial Committee should oversee preparations. There should be plenty of emphasis on the preparedness of many different sectors, in addition to human health and animal health.
- 4) Governments should articulate what budgets they are assigning to pandemic preparedness interventions from different Ministries.
- 5) Governments should review whether the legal and regulatory framework enables necessary actions in the event of a pandemic, for example relating to travel, quarantine, isolation, social distancing and closure of places of assembly.
- 6) The interests of vulnerable groups and migrants should be incorporated in planning.

- 7) Civil society and local communities should be involved in developing pandemic preparedness plans.
- 8) It is important to test contingency plans at all levels, including through simulation exercises, and learn lessons from such tests.

B. Local planning

- 9) It is important that planning extends to a local level, including the role of local authorities. Central authorities should provide advice to local authorities.
- 10) Local authorities and community groups should plan how to develop the capacity to deal with large numbers of deaths.

C. Actions in specific sectors

- 11) Governments should develop a comprehensive security plan to protect against theft, fraud, corruption, demonstrations, unrest, and illegal trade.
- 12) The Ministry of Defence should consider what military assets should be brought to bear in the event of a pandemic, how to mobilise them and how to intensively liaise with non-military partners in other sectors.
- 13) In countries dependent on electronic systems, ICT infrastructure and staff will be critical. Governments should consider how best to strengthen networks and prepare for surges in demand.
- 14) Transport operators and authorities need to minimise infection risks and staff absences in vital transport, air and sea ports, and loading and unloading facilities, to enable supply of medicines and food to continue even in WHO Phase 6.
- 15) The financial sector should plan business continuity, so as to be able to maintain essential cash, credit, banking, payment, salary, pension and regulation services in the face of significant absenteeism. Central banks, finance ministries and prudential regulators should conduct testing of systemic resilience to pandemic risks.
- 16) Governments should work with local and international humanitarian actors to develop plans as to who has the capacity where to meet which basic needs of vulnerable populations (food, health, shelter, water and sanitation) in a pandemic, so as to clarify responsibilities, identify gaps and avoid duplication.

D. Contingency planning for the maintenance of essential services

- 17) Essential services need to develop business continuity plans to limit disruption.
- 18) In business continuity plans, organisations should (a) consider how to deal with a high level of staff absenteeism and minimise its impact on their activities; (b) provide clear command structures, delegations of authority and orders of succession for workers; (c) assess the need to stockpile strategic reserves of supplies, material and equipment; (d) identify who is going to do what when and how; (e) identify the personnel, supplies and equipment vital to maintain essential functions; (f) assign and train alternates for critical posts; (g) establish guidelines for priority of access to

essential services; (h) plan for security risks to their operations and supply chain; (i) prepare to enable staff to work from home; (j) consider the need for family and childcare support for essential workers; (k) consider the need for psychosocial support services to help workers to remain effective.

- 19) Specific individuals in organisations and businesses should be accountable for preparing for a crisis.
- 20) Organisations and businesses should prepare to face reduced travel, reduced face-to-face meetings, reduced accessibility of funds, disruptions in access to data systems, difficulty in procuring and distributing supplies and competition for skilled workers.
- 21) Employers should educate employees on prevention, health and safety and mitigation.

E. Information, education and communication

- 22) The Government should have a communication strategy to improve public awareness, including in remote rural areas.
- 23) The public should be informed and consulted about Government plans so as to manage expectations. Clear messages for citizens, media and international organisations about the threat and planned response should be delivered.
- 24) To maintain public confidence, Governments should demonstrate that they have robust preparedness plans; the power to take extraordinary measures if needed; the capacity to deliver essential services reliably; and arrangements to return to normal life quickly after the pandemic.
- 25) The Government should set up a national flu hotline and pandemic website as sources of advice and information and designate national and regional spokespersons.
- 26) Communication skills training should be provided to those expected to be involved in communicating.
- 27) Community groups and leaders should be used to build public confidence, disseminate information and identify people at risk.
- 28) Nominating pandemic preparedness representatives in minority populations can help to cross language and cultural barriers.
- 29) Communication should differentiate between avian flu and human flu, and be tailored to each WHO phase of the pandemic.

F. Social distancing

- 30) The Government should develop a strategy for how it will take and implement decisions on closure of schools, prisons, residential care homes and workplaces. Special care should be taken when considering school closures as it will then be necessary for adults in households to stay at home to take care of children, which may not be easy.
- 31) The Interior Ministry should develop a strategy regarding whether and how it will restrict mass gatherings.

- 32) At Phases 4-5, Governments should recommend reduced staff presence. Telecommuting and working from home should be encouraged. Non-critical staff should not come to work. Essential workers who come to work should stay at least one metre away from each other at all times.
- 33) Governments should consider introducing a 'pandemic severity index' with recommendations for communities to implement differentiated measures according to the evolving case fatality rate of the pandemic (as has been developed in the United States).

G. Movement and borders

- 34) Port and airport operators and carriers should consider how restrictions on international travel and additional entry or exit screening could be set in place quickly.
- 35) The Ministries of Transport and Interior should develop a strategy for whether and how they would impose and manage border control measures.
- 36) Governments should consider whether and how to restrict movement to and from affected areas.
- 37) Border control, quarantining, surveillance and screening measures should strike a balance between addressing containment and infection and limiting the impact on trade. Any measures to limit movement of people, animals or goods should not be maintained for longer than essential to achieve public health objectives; and should be driven by the science-based recommendations of international organisations.

H. Cross-border implications

- 38) Planning should be coordinated with other countries in the region whose actions could have a cross-border impact.
- 39) Governments should provide support to foreign nationals stranded by border closures, quarantine measures or transport disruption; and should have systems in place to identify dead foreigners and work with consulates to provide for burial or repatriation of bodies.