

Here are questions to ask during an outbreak, questions to ask once an outbreak becomes a pandemic and which actions your crisis management team should perform regularly afterward to stay prepared.

Questions to Ask When Reports Reveal the Risk of an Outbreak:

Information and Communication Concerns

- 1) What is the nature of the disease? How is it transmitted?
- 2) What are its symptoms, and what healthcare precautions are appropriate?
- 3) Do employees know what to do and who to contact if they are infected or may have been exposed to the virus?
- 4) How will the company communicate with its employees if they are not at work?
- 5) At what point do managers need to communicate to upper management that there is a potential problem?
- 6) How will potential problems be communicated to employees and clients? Can you use the name of the employee when communicating to staff?
- 7) Have call centers been set up to maintain contact with third parties, clients and employees?

Human Resource/Benefit Concerns

- 1) What is the company's position if an employee wants to work at home?
- 2) What happens if an infected employee comes to work?
- 3) What if a non-native employee wants to be temporarily transferred to another region? What about his or her family?
- 4) Is the company prepared to provide family death support, paid time off to attend co-worker funeral, over the limit on vacation time, etc.?
- 5) How do we make sure that we comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which limits what we can ask about an employee's health, and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which also may apply if an employee needs to take unpaid leave?
- 6) What are we doing in terms of training or messaging to reinforce the importance of maintaining a respectful workplace and destigmatizing the source of any pandemic?

Operational Concerns

- 1) Can the company operate with 25% or greater absenteeism?
- 2) Can the company have employees work remotely?
- 3) Can the company increase flexibility and accommodation for liberal leave and compensation?
- 4) Will the company monitor or even restrict travel to high-risk regions?
- 5) What infrastructure support is needed to support a shift to an at-home workforce?
- 6) How does the company know that supply resources are not contaminated?

- 7) How will clients be assured that products are not contaminated?
- 8) Will there be disruption to the company's supply chains?
- 9) What are the procedures to decontaminate the facility and its heating, ventilation, air-conditioning systems, electronic equipment and soft materials (blankets, curtains, etc.)?
- 10) What assurances need to be provided to the facility staff so that they are safe at work?
- 11) At what point does the company prohibit staff from traveling to certain geographic areas?
- 12) How will traveling employees be brought home, particularly if they are sick?
- 13) Are there escalation procedures to get additional resources?
- 14) Are employees cross-trained and able to perform multiple duties if the flu causes high absenteeism?
- 15) Is there a trained crisis management team that includes on-call staff?
- 16) Do the team members know what is expected of them? Are the correct personnel management and others designated to participate on the team?

External Communication Concerns

- 1) Are executives capable of delivering the right messages?
- 2) Have press releases been prepared that can be adapted to fit the situation?
- 3) Are mechanisms in place for managing external communications?
- 4) What if the current means of communication fail?
- 5) Are there trained spokespeople for dealing with the media and other stakeholders?

Questions to Ask During a Declared Pandemic:

- 1) Is the crisis management team operating effectively? Does it have the necessary and readily available resources to support its activities?
- 2) Where will the team and its support resources stay if they have to travel or relocate to a different facility?
- 3) Has the team initially identified and monitored changes of the recovery time objectives for each of the critical business processes that may be interrupted?
- 4) Have pandemic-specific strategies been developed for each process? Does the organization understand how these plans will be put into action?
- 5) Have the strategies been integrated in an effective manner or prioritized, particularly if multiple facilities and regions are affected?
- 6) Have supply chain dependencies and alternative channels been identified and secured in case of disruption? What happens if the backup fails?
- 7) Are there alternative premises and facilities within and outside of an affected region that can be used?
- 8) Are transport links likely to be sufficient to get people and resources to the alternate sites?

Activities to Perform on a Regular Basis:

- 1) Educate employees on the nature of pandemic risk and the potential means by which it could directly affect the following:
 - a. Operations
 - b. Resources
 - c. Reputation
 - d. Financial health
- 2) Review existing corporate preparedness plans, procedures and policies, including:
 - a. Business continuity plans
 - b. Risk management controls
 - c. Human resource policies
 - d. Communication capabilities
 - e. Critical third parties
 - f. Potential sales impact
- 3) Review, update and test all existing plans based on the threat posed by any pandemic.
- 4) Consider establishing escalation trigger points based on warning levels issued by WHO, CDC, etc.
- 5) Maintain contact with governments, international agencies and industry groups about the availability of new guidance.
- 6) Tell employees what to do and who to inform if they identify a suspected infection among their colleagues.
- 7) Define responsibilities within the organization for pandemic planning and tracking the development of potential threats.
- 8) Reexamine the supply chain and assess what additional risks exist to the continuation of service from third parties through operations to customers.
- 9) Share pandemic preparedness and response plans with key third parties and service providers to increase transparency of responses and align activities.
- 10) Review or develop employee health procedures to minimize the potential for transmission of infectious diseases to other workers.
- 11) Evaluate current employee healthcare plans to ensure adequate coverage in the event of prolonged absence from work.
- 12) Consider building capacity for telecommuting.
- 13) Develop a plan to educate staff about possible consequences and preparation steps being taken by the company.
- 14) Test operations pandemic response plans regularly. Consider running a rehearsal using various outbreak scenarios.
- 15) Train senior managers in crisis management skills and/or give them access to crisis management resources.
- 16) Check whether facilities can support clean operating environments (e.g., filtration of air conditioning systems).

Indicators of Quality Third Party Preparedness Plans

Lack of Variance Between Organization's and Third Party's Assumptions

- Does the third party build its preparedness plan around our requirements?
- Does the third party make accurate assumptions about the volume and location of the goods and services we need?

Realistic Recovery Actions and Timelines

- What assumptions does the third party make about its ability to execute its BCM plan in relation to meeting our recovery requirements?
- How detailed is the third party's pandemic preparedness plan for the goods and services we use?
- Has the third party performed pandemic planning exercises to validate the effectiveness of its plan?

Clear Escalation Criteria

- Does the crisis communication plan include timely customer notification to effectively respond to a potential disruption of goods and services provided to us?

Appropriate Handling of Past Pandemic Events

- Can the third party describe its response to an event in the past?
- What lessons or improvements did the third party take away from the experience?

Assessment of Own Critical Third Parties

- Does the third party conduct preparedness evaluations of its own critical third parties that are linked to the goods and services consumed by our organization (e.g. fourth-party risk)?