

# INFLUENZA PANDEMIC: BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING GUIDE



Organisation  
de la sécurité civile  
du Québec



Québec 

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## NOTICE

The *Influenza Pandemic: Business Continuity Planning Guide* is an evolving document that may be modified and improved. The Ministère du Développement économique, de l'Innovation et de l'Exportation will update it as soon as more pandemic-related information becomes available in the area of civil protection or public health. The most recent version of the document, identifiable by the number appearing in the lower right corner, is available from the site [www.mdeie.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.mdeie.gouv.qc.ca), section: Publications/outils d'aide à la gestion.

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The masculine gender is used in this document to designate both women and men.

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## PREVENTION: OUR BEST ALLY



The *Influenza Pandemic: Business Continuity Planning Guide* is an application of the National Civil Protection Plan. The latter is the government standard for planning and prevention in the event of a major disaster anywhere in Québec.

Similar to other natural catastrophes, a pandemic could have negative consequences on our businesses and our economic activities. The purpose of this Guide is to help companies develop a Business Continuity Plan to minimize the consequences of a disaster.

In an emergency situation, the timeliness of action often makes the difference. To act quickly, planning is always the best organizational technique and in particular the best means of prevention. Confronted with a potential risk, we must organize collectively and implement all measures necessary to reduce the impacts of the identified risk.

This document is a tool elaborated by the Ministère du Développement économique, de l'Innovation et de l'Exportation to help companies develop an effective response strategy.

It is the intention of the Québec government to support you in your initiatives and your preventive actions.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'C. Gignac', written in a cursive style.

**CLÉMENT GIGNAC**

Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Export Trade

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## INTRODUCTION

There is more and more talk of a possible worldwide influenza epidemic (pandemic). Experts estimate for example, that the probability of an influenza pandemic increases as time passes, because according to historical data a pandemic normally occurs every 10 to 40 years, and the last was in 1968. However, it is not possible to predict exactly when the next pandemic will strike, how severe it will be, nor which parts of the population will be most affected. But we do know that it could have major repercussions on the population's health and, consequently, on the operations of many businesses.

The *Influenza Pandemic: Business Continuity Planning Guide* is intended to help companies develop a Business Continuity Plan to minimize the consequences of a pandemic or any other significant disaster<sup>1</sup> (e.g. floods, ice storm, major fires, service outages, etc.). A pandemic continuity plan serves to evaluate risks due to absenteeism, supply chain disruption, production losses, decreased sales, possible border closings and to identify solutions to these problems. Effective preparedness can mitigate the negative impacts of a pandemic and can also be useful if other major disasters should occur.

The Ministère du Développement économique, de l'Innovation et de l'Exportation encourages all businesses to develop a Business Continuity Plan, in particular those that provide essential goods and services to the population.

The *Influenza Pandemic: Business Continuity Planning Guide* occasionally refers to documents prepared by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS), the Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CSST) and the Commission des normes du travail (CNT) who are the authorities in the fields of public health or labour standards. These documents are available on the website [pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca).

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1. The *Influenza Pandemic: Business Continuity Planning Guide* is part of a much broader civil protection plan. The *National Civil Protection Plan* (NCPP) is the basis of government planning for all major disaster risks in Québec, including a possible pandemic.

## THE RISK AND CONSEQUENCES OF AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

History shows that pandemics occur three or four times per century. In the course of the last century, the world experienced three influenza pandemics: the Spanish flu (1918-1919), the Asian flu (1957-1958) and the Hong Kong flu (1968-1969), at intervals of 10 to 40 years. The most devastating epidemic, that of 1918-1919, caused the death of 20 to 40 million people around the world, most of them in good health and in the prime of life.

An influenza pandemic threatens to severely disrupt personal and social life. Individuals, their families, work environments, in short, the whole society could be affected in terms of health, the economy, business, education, culture and recreation<sup>2</sup>.

Currently, there is no influenza pandemic in Québec nor elsewhere in the world. However, public health experts consider that the probability of a pandemic is constantly increasing.

In particular, three of four conditions necessary for the appearance of a pandemic are already present:

- The H5N1 virus, responsible for the avian flu, represents a new strain of influenza.
- Human beings have no immunity against this new strain.
- The H5N1 virus is sufficiently deadly to cause a pandemic.

At the time of this Guide's publication, the fourth essential condition for the emergence of a pandemic, i.e. human-to-human transmission of the virus, is still absent.

To prepare ourselves to best confront a pandemic, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux has made the following assumptions<sup>3</sup>:

- A first wave of infection, lasting about eight weeks, could affect a third of the population (2.6 million people).
- A second wave could occur about three to nine months later, and could also be followed by other successive waves.
- 1.4 million individuals would need to make use of health services.
- 34,000 would require hospitalization.
- 8,500 could die from being ill.

In the workplace, the spread of a pandemic would be similar to that in the population as a whole, that is about 35% of the labour force could fall sick.

During a pandemic, it will not be business as usual, and companies risk being affected in different ways.

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2. You can monitor the evolution of the H5N1 virus and the risk of a pandemic on the site [pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca).

3. These estimates are based on the scenario developed in the *Québec Pandemic Influenza Plan – Health Mission*, a document published by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) in March 2006.

## IMPACTS OF AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

### Particularities of a pandemic

The characteristics of a pandemic are different from those of natural catastrophes. Many regions of the world will be affected, making external assistance almost impossible. It will last several months and sometimes require measures to limit social contacts, such as travel restrictions, quarantine or the closing of public meeting places. It affects everyone, individuals and organizations, directly or indirectly, threatening their physical or psychological health, but also, often, their economic health as well.

### Impact of a pandemic on business

Businesses are sure to be affected by a pandemic. How and to what extent they will be affected may vary, but probably all will be impacted.

The first consequence of an influenza pandemic would be absenteeism among human resources. In addition to incapacity to work because of sickness, employees could be absent to take care of sick parents or children, or be forced to stay home because of closed schools and day care centres, for example, or simply from fear of contracting the virus.

Employers must expect an absenteeism rate of up to 50% of their personnel, for about two weeks at the peak of every wave of a serious pandemic. A pandemic could last a year or more, and involve two or three waves lasting six to eight weeks each.

In addition to causing a lack of human resources, an influenza pandemic could hinder the normal operation of businesses in many different ways:

- The provision of essential services like information, telecommunications, and financial services, energy supply, and logistics may be disrupted.
- The supply chain required for the conduct of commercial activities could become unreliable. Greater difficulties can also be expected in deliveries of goods imported from abroad.
- Borders could be closed both for export and import of products.
- Meetings, public gatherings and face-to-face business contacts could be cancelled for fear of contagion or because of low expected attendance.
- Customer orders could be cancelled or be impossible to fulfill.
- The demand for products and services would probably be affected, increasing in some cases (e.g. Internet access) or decreasing in others (e.g. travel and leisure-related activities).
- Subcontractor services could be negatively affected, possibly affecting the maintenance of critical equipment.

Businesses could thus have difficulty maintaining staff levels, acquiring necessary supplies, maintaining a minimal level of operations and continuing to provide services to their customers.



## **Economic impact of a pandemic**

Depending on its length and severity, an influenza pandemic could have a significant negative impact on the economy and could considerably reduce the possibility of doing business and pursuing commercial activities.

Sectors where human contact is common, such as retail sales, leisure activities, sports, and hotels and restaurants, could be hit particularly hard by a pandemic. It is also highly likely that consumers will reduce their expenses in travel and recreation, including transportation, hotels, cruises, entertainment and visits to public places. In any case, any mass change of behaviour would have repercussions on the economy.

A pandemic could be costly to the Québec economy, in medical expenses and in loss of productivity, and could have a significant impact on the gross domestic product. For all these reasons, a pandemic requires special planning on the part of business and government authorities.

## THE BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

Business Continuity Planning is a proactive process that ensures critical services or products are delivered during a disruption. Essential products and services are those whose absence, even for a short period, would have serious consequences for a customer, a company, a collectivity or a government.

A Business Continuity Plan (BCP) involves the following elements:

- Plans, measures and arrangements to ensure the continuous delivery of critical services and products, which permits the organization to recover its facility, data and assets.
- Identification of necessary resources to support business continuity, including personnel, information, equipment, financial allocations, legal counsel, and protection of infrastructure and facilities.

Having a BCP enhances an organization's image with employees, shareholders and customers by demonstrating a responsible attitude. Additional benefits include improvement in overall organizational efficiency and identifying the relationship of assets and human and financial resources with respect to critical services and products.

Developing a BCP, and keeping it up-to-date, will help to ensure that the necessary resources and information are available to respond to a pandemic.

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4. The Organisation de la sécurité civile du Québec names four stages in all: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

## The importance of a continuity plan

A Business Continuity Plan (BCP) should be an essential element of any business' strategy or operating procedures. In recent years, the impacts on businesses of 9/11, SARS, the 1997 ice storm and other natural disasters has only reinforced the importance of continuity plans. Current concern about the risk of an avian flu pandemic further emphasizes the point that continuity planning must take the specific case of highly infectious diseases into account.

While many larger companies and essential services have developed contingency plans, most smaller and mid-sized firms have not. This lack of preparedness not only threatens the viability of a large sector of the Québec economy, but, as in the case of manufacturing, also jeopardizes the delivery of critical goods and services that depend on complex supply chain systems. In a time of crisis, it is important to consider the interdependence of businesses and recognize the importance of business continuity.

## The Business Resumption Plan versus the Business Continuity Plan

A Business Resumption Plan, like a Disaster Recovery Plan, describes how the company resumes its activities after an **interruption**. It is reactive.

The Business Continuity Plan enables the company to **pursue** its activities. Instead of focusing on resuming a business after critical operations have ceased, it ensures the availability of critical products and services. It is proactive.

Since we know that in a pandemic certain products or services must continue to be provided, it is important that businesses develop a Business Continuity Plan.

## PLANNING BUSINESS CONTINUITY FOR AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

For purposes of pandemic planning, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux has defined three stages of action recognized by the Organisation de la sécurité civile du Québec for any disaster, that is, “preparedness” (before the pandemic), “response” (during the pandemic) and “recovery” (during and after the pandemic)<sup>4</sup>. The up-to-date information provided on the site [pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca) often refers to these three stages.

A Business Continuity Plan designed to counter the impact of an influenza pandemic should cover these three stages.

To develop your company’s Business Continuity Plan, we recommend that you follow the checklist presented further on in this document. It covers most aspects of a continuity plan and will help you to identify special measures that you can take today, to prepare for a possible pandemic or for any other major disaster.

You can also directly access the guide published by the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME), *Influenza Pandemic: Continuity Planning Guide for Canadian Business*, at [http://www.cme-mec.ca/pdf/CME\\_Pandemic\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.cme-mec.ca/pdf/CME_Pandemic_Guide.pdf).

## CHECKLIST FOR BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING

The information provided in this checklist is generic and must of course be adapted to the specific situations and needs of each organization. Some SMEs may not possess the required resources to perform all actions listed. However, it is recommended that every business, whatever its size, should develop at least a basic plan, including all the main sections mentioned below, to ensure the maintenance of its operations in a pandemic.

### Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your business:

- Identify a coordinator or team** with defined roles and responsibilities for pandemic preparedness and response planning. The planning process should include input from employees and labour representatives.
- Identify essential employees and other critical** inputs (raw materials, suppliers, sub-contractor services/products, logistics, etc.) required to maintain business operations by location and function during a pandemic.
- Verify whether your suppliers and subcontractors have a Business Continuity Plan (BCP)** and, in such case, take it into account or else encourage them to develop one. The interdependence of businesses is greater in times of crisis.
- Train and prepare a back-up ancillary workforce** (e.g. contractors, employees in other job titles/descriptions, retirees).
- Develop and plan two scenarios:** one assuming increased demand for your products or services in a pandemic, the other assuming decreased demand.
- Determine the potential impact of a pandemic on company business financials** using multiple possible scenarios that affect different product lines and/or business sites.
- Determine the potential impact of a pandemic on business-related domestic and international travel** (e.g. quarantines, border closures).
- Establish an emergency communications plan and revise periodically.** This plan includes identification of key contacts (with back-ups) and chain of communications (including suppliers and customers).
- Implement an exercise/drill to test your plan,** and revise periodically.
- Get reliable pandemic information from the site [pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca),** provided to citizens by the Québec government. You can also obtain information from your regional Agence de la santé et des services sociaux, and from emergency management and municipal sources.

## Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your employees and customers:

- **Forecast and allow for employee absences** due to personal illness, family member illness, possible closures of schools, day care centres or businesses, interruption of public transportation, etc.
- **Implement guidelines to modify the frequency and type of face-to-face contact** (e.g. hand-shaking, direct participation in meetings, close sharing of office space, shared working materials) among employees and between employees and customers.
- **Encourage and track annual influenza vaccination** for employees (optional).
- **Evaluate employee access to and availability of healthcare services** during a pandemic, and improve services as needed.
- **Evaluate employee access to and availability of mental health and social services** during a pandemic, including corporate and community resources, and improve services as needed (if possible).
- **Identify employees and key customers with special needs**, and incorporate the requirements of such persons into your preparedness plan.

## Establish policies to be implemented during a pandemic:

- **Establish plan activation guidelines.**
- **Establish policies for employee compensation and sick-leave absences** unique to a pandemic, including policies on when a previously ill person is no longer infectious and can return to work after illness. Read the checklist for employers, the *Aide-mémoire sur les normes du travail à considérer*, prepared by the Commission des normes du travail (CNT). This guide is available on the website [pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca).
- **Establish policies for flexible worksites (e.g. telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g. staggered shifts).** It will help to read the employer's guide, *Aide-mémoire sur les normes du travail à considérer*.
- **Establish policies for preventing the spread of influenza in the workplace** (e.g. promoting respiratory etiquette, hand hygiene, annual vaccination and prompt exclusion of people with influenza symptoms). Read the Québec employers' and workers' guide, *Mesures de prévention de l'influenza dans un contexte pandémique* prepared by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux and the Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail. This guide is available on the website [pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca).
- **Establish policies for employees who have been exposed to the influenza virus**, are suspected to be ill, or become ill in the workplace. It will help to read the Québec employer's and worker's guide, *Mesures de prévention de l'influenza dans un contexte pandémique*. This guide is available on the website [pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca).

- ❑ **Establish employee contact control guidelines.**
- ❑ **Establish policies for restricting travel to affected regions.** Consider both domestic and international sites where there is an outbreak. Consider the possibility of evacuating employees working in or near an affected area when an outbreak begins, and provide guidance for employees returning from affected areas.
- ❑ **Determine responsibilities, procedures and the communication of information for the activation and discontinuation of the continuity plan.**

### Allocate resources to protect your employees and customers:

For this section, it will help to read the Québec employer's and worker's guide, *Mesures de prévention de l'influenza dans un contexte pandémique*.

- ❑ **Provide sufficient and accessible infection control supplies** (e.g. hand-hygiene products, tissues and receptacles for their disposal) in all business locations.
- ❑ **Enhance communications and information technology infrastructures** as needed to support employee telecommuting and remote customer access.
- ❑ **Ensure availability of medical consultation** and advice for emergency response.

### Communicate to and educate your employees:

For this section, also see the Québec employers' and workers' guide, *Mesures de prévention de l'influenza dans un contexte pandémique* and *Prévention des impacts psychosociaux dans un contexte de pandémie d'influenza*, prepared by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux.

- ❑ **Develop and disseminate programs and materials covering pandemic fundamentals** (e.g. signs and symptoms of influenza, mode of transmission, how to react, etc.), personal and family protection and response strategies (e.g. hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, contingency plans, etc.). Encourage your personnel to seek information by accessing the government site [pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca).
- ❑ **Anticipate employee fear and anxiety**, rumours and misinformation, and plan communications accordingly.
- ❑ **Ensure that communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate** (choose correct terms understood by all).
- ❑ **Present your pandemic Business Continuity Plan to employees.**
- ❑ **Provide information for the at-home care** of ill employees and family members. Consult a medical adviser or your regional Agence de la santé et des services sociaux to obtain suggestions on how to take care of people who are sick.

- **Set up a system to disseminate information** on the pandemic and how to respond to it for employees, vendors, suppliers, and customers inside and outside the workplace.
- **First obtain information from the government site [pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](https://pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca)** and identify official complementary sources to obtain accurate and timely pandemic information (national and international) as well as available prevention resources (e.g. vaccines and antivirals).

### **Coordinate with external organizations and help your community:**

- **Collaborate with insurers, healthcare facilities and the Agence de la santé et des services sociaux** to share your pandemic plans with them and understand their capacity to respond to community needs and their pandemic response plans.
- **Collaborate with the Agence de la santé et des services sociaux** or emergency responders to participate in their planning processes, share your pandemic plans, and understand their capabilities and plans.
- **Communicate with your regional Agence de la santé et des services sociaux** or emergency responders about the assets or services your business could contribute to the community.
- **Share best practices with other businesses in your communities** to improve community response efforts.



## CONCLUSION

Pandemic Business Continuity Planning is an important exercise that every business must perform to guard against the impacts of a possible pandemic on its operations.

The essential activities of a continuity plan include:

- rapidly form a task force dedicated to pandemic preparedness;
- plan for the maintenance of the company's critical operations;
- plan how to maintain operations with highly reduced staff levels;
- plan for supply chain interruptions and border closures;
- analyze the financial impacts;
- evaluate risks to traveling personnel and prepare an evacuation plan for personnel stationed abroad;
- manage communications with personnel and customers.

Like any other plan, the pandemic Business Continuity Plan must be updated as the disease evolves in various regions of the world and must take into account actual experiences and strategies applied to ensure business continuity.



[www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.pandemiequebec.gouv.qc.ca)

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