

## HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR WORKPLACE

For further information on the influenza pandemic go to the Department of Labour website [www.dol.govt.nz/initiatives/workplace/pandemic/general-info.asp](http://www.dol.govt.nz/initiatives/workplace/pandemic/general-info.asp)

Or the Ministry of Health website [www.moh.govt.nz/influenza](http://www.moh.govt.nz/influenza)

## PANDEMIC PLANNING A GUIDE FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY REPS AND EMPLOYEES

There are steps you can take now to help minimise the risk and impact of an influenza pandemic on your health and your job.

If your workplace doesn't have a pandemic plan its important that you and your employer start preparing for a pandemic now by talking about ways of protecting people's health. Staff often come up with the best ideas on how to make work safer. They can make a valuable contribution to helping workplaces survive the financial impact of a pandemic.

This guide will help you understand and prepare for some of the situations that may arise at work during a pandemic. It is a general guide and should not be considered as legal advice.

Here are some key points to bear in mind:

- The health and safety rep and employees have an important role in working with the employer to develop and implement a pandemic plan for the workplace. Think creatively about how you can manage potential pandemic-related hazards in your workplace. Involve key people, such as customers and suppliers, in this planning.
- Success will require workers and employers to be flexible, and to work together cooperatively. The options you and your employer take during a pandemic will impact on how well your workplace survives the pandemic, and how quickly it recovers.
- The law gives you and your employer certain rights and obligations. But these don't give all the answers in a pandemic situation. You and your employer need to take a practical and human approach.

- Expect your employer and co-workers to be concerned about contracting flu during a pandemic - it's only natural. Also expect them to be worried about ensuring the business survives financially.

**The role of the Health and safety Rep includes (but is not limited to the following),**

- Fostering positive health and safety management practices in the place of work
- Identifying and bringing to the employers attention hazards in the workplace and discussing ways the hazard can be managed
- Consulting with inspectors on health and safety issues
- Advising employees on the right to refuse work likely to cause serious harm under section 28A of the HSE Act
- Working in good faith with the employer to address and resolve health and safety issues
- Issuing a hazard notice under the HSE Act

**The right to refuse work likely to cause serious harm**

Section 28A of the HSE Act provides employees with the right to refuse work that they believe could cause serious harm. The definition of serious harm includes exposure to communicable disease such as Influenza.

To refuse to do work likely to cause serious harm the employee must believe on reasonable grounds that the work could cause serious harm. A health and safety rep can advise to refuse work likely to cause serious harm but he or she must have reasonable grounds for believing that the work could lead to serious harm.

If you'd like advice regarding your 'right to refuse work likely to cause serious harm contact either your H&S Rep, your union office or the local Department of Labour Inspector.

The following information is from the Department of Labour's website. For more information go to,

<http://www.dol.govt.nz/initiatives/workplace/pandemic/general-info.asp>

Or contact the Department of Labour on 0800 20 90 20 between 9.00am - 5:00pm.

**Q. If there is a pandemic what can I do to protect myself and my workplace?**

**A.** Talk with your employer, union, health and safety representatives, and co-workers about ways to reduce health risks, and to keep the business open for as long as possible. Think creatively about how you can manage potential pandemic-related hazards in your workplace. Involve key people, such as customers and suppliers, in your planning.

Good health and safety practices involve elimination, isolation and minimisation. In a pandemic situation, the biggest risk (and, therefore, the thing to try and eliminate, isolate or minimise as much as possible) is close contact between people. There is no one, single response you can plan for - you and your workmates need to be able to respond flexibly depending on the situation. Think about your workplace and what is practical for you.

Examples include:

**Eliminate** the risk of possible infection through person-to-person contact:

- Enable more people to work from home without the need for face to face meetings
- Offer internet shopping and other self-service options (and be prepared for more customers to use it)
- Work varied shift patterns, or extended or flexible hours to limit the number of people in the workplace at any one time
- Don't be a martyr" - don't come into the workplace if you are feeling unwell.

**Isolate** the risk of possible infection:

- Install screens
- Use 'Night Service' windows to remove direct staff/customer contact

**Minimise** the risk of possible infection:

- Provide and use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where appropriate and practical for your workplace e.g. P2 masks, gloves etc. and provide the associated training, waste disposal and decontamination facilities
- Provide training and improve facilities to maximise personal hygiene e.g. hand washing techniques, foot-operated, lined waste bins

- Provide training and facilities to enable people to maintain social distancing i.e. so they are able to work far enough away from others to prevent cross infection

**Q. [If there is a pandemic what must my employer do to ensure the workplace is safe?](#)**

**A.** Your employer is obliged to manage exposure to hazards in the workplace and should have a plan to manage the risk of flu spreading through the workplace. Staff including H&S reps should have input into this plan, and should be informed and trained on how to follow it.

**Q. [If there is a pandemic what Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) should I use?](#)**

**A.** There is **no** one, single type of PPE that will reduce the risk of influenza infection in every business circumstance. However, there are a range of other options (involving eliminating or isolating the risk) that can be considered alongside PPE equipment that will minimise the risk of infection. When considering whether PPE has a role, you need to look at whether it is appropriate or practical for your staff to use or wear. Staff should be involved in the discussion and trial of PPE.

If your workplace has identified a role for PPE it is important that staff receive training and facilities to maximise personal hygiene and enable people to maintain social distancing - reducing the risk of cross infection. Such training will include hand washing techniques and correct fitting of face masks. Ensure that stocks of the relevant PPE are available in advance. For example, appropriate PPE may include P2 masks and gloves.

For more detailed background on workplace health, hygiene and safety management options, including the use of personal protective equipment, before and during a pandemic, go to the [pandemic section](#) of the DOL website and look at our more detailed Workplace PPE guidance material. Go to <http://www.dol.govt.nz/initiatives/workplace/pandemic/respirators.asp>

**Q. [If there is a pandemic do I have to go to work, even if I'm worried I'll catch flu there?](#)**

**A.** Your employer should talk to you about the risk of infection at work, and what is being done to reduce these risks. Staff should have a say in identifying and controlling the risks.

You will be expected to go to work if you are physically able to, and your employer has taken all practicable steps to keep you safe. That is, all the safety measures a reasonable person

could be expected to put in place, given the risks involved, what's known about them, and the cost and availability of safeguards.

If you are still worried you need to discuss your concerns with your employer, or health and safety representative. If after this discussion you are still concerned that the safety measures taken aren't enough given a heightened risk of infection, you can refuse to do tasks that you believe could cause you serious harm.

**Q. [If there is a pandemic what happens if I need to stay at home to care for family?](#)**

**A.** People will have important and legitimate personal, family and community responsibilities (for example, childcare if schools are closed), so your planning will need to take this into account. Treat these responsibilities as a reality you need to work with rather than work against.

In order for your business to stand a good chance of surviving and recovering after a pandemic - it is in your (and your staff's) interest to be able to respond flexibly to the different scenarios a pandemic may create.

Involve your staff when considering alternative ways of working that will enable you to keep your business open as long as possible. Or, if you are an essential service - to remain open right through the pandemic. This may include working from home or working different hours.

In addition to allowing staff time to care for family, these options also have another benefit. They may reduce the risk of cross-infection by having less people in your workplace at any one time.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The DOL website has a risk assessment tool you can use that identifies common sources of exposure to flu and potential controls for reducing the risk. Go to <http://www.dol.govt.nz/initiatives/workplace/pandemic/risk-analysis.asp>

*(Examples on the following page)*

**Example:**

<b>Risk factor</b>	<b>Controls to minimize risk</b>
Number of times staff come in contact with people each day	Reduce the number of people in contact with staff each day  Conduct business by telephone or the internet  Use a telephone-operated reception desk Conduct meetings and training sessions by phone or online  Reduce or suspend travel and use of public transport  Introduce or increase use of shift work and working from home  Stagger lunch hours and other use of communal facilities

For further general information go to [www.moh.govt.nz/influenza](http://www.moh.govt.nz/influenza)