

Viral Outbreaks

Viral outbreaks of diseases like Influenza, Ebola and Enterovirus D68 (EV-D68) can spread quickly with devastating consequences. Awareness is crucial in protecting yourself, your family and your employees and ensuring your organization continues operations.

Some diseases, like Ebola, are spread through contact with blood and other body fluids and are not likely to affect most workplaces. Those at highest risk for Ebola are healthcare workers and family members and friends of those who are sick or have died from Ebola.

Other illnesses, such as the respiratory infection EV-D68, are spread when an infected person coughs, sneezes or touches a surface that is touched by someone else, and are more likely to spread throughout a workplace.

While there are currently no vaccines to prevent either of these particular illnesses, there are a number of preventive actions you can take to keep yourself, your family and your employees safe, and business operating as usual.

Seasonal influenza is more common and widespread. Flu season typically begins when cold weather strikes and can last into spring. For many people, the seasonal flu is a mild illness, but for others it can result in serious infections or hospitalization. Influenza is also spread through coughing, sneezing and talking, however, there are vaccines available. Health professionals recommend a yearly seasonal flu vaccine.

In addition to seasonal flu there are other types of influenza including swine flu and avian flu. Travelers should use increased caution and preventative measures when visiting locations where flu outbreaks are occurring.

Share Prevention Strategies with Employees

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

- Avoid close contact with those who are ill.
- Clean and disinfect common areas and frequently touched surfaces.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve, not your hand.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Avoid traveling to areas affected by a viral outbreak.
- Know the symptoms and consult your doctor if you have them (or if you have contact with someone who does).

Protect Employees and Plan for Business Continuity

- Communicate the company pandemic/epidemic plan and ensure they are trained on it.
- Preserve vital records off site.
- Establish a continuity plan for employee absenteeism, and consider flexible schedules or telecommuting.
- Utilize teleconferencing or online meetings in place of large, in-person gatherings.
- Cancel non-essential travel to areas affected by an outbreak.
- Compile contact info for employees' emergency contacts, clients, the public health department and police/fire/paramedics.
- Have masks, gloves and cleaning agents available at your site.
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