COVID-19
Don't Panic: Prepare

IT departments must take the lead on pandemic response planning.

Executive Summary

Situation

COVID-19, a strand of coronavirus, has emerged as a significant risk to the personal wellbeing of employees and operational success of organizations. **Currently, the risk to individuals remains low across most regions,** but there is enough concern about future elevation of risk that organizations need to act now to ensure they are prepared for wider outbreaks.

Complication

COVID-19 still has a lot of unknowns. Despite efforts by international and regional health authorities, **misinformation and misinterpretation of available information** are complicating the situation as individuals and organizations seek to quickly understand the risks posed to themselves and others.

Solution

1. **Take immediate actions** to provide calm and information, assign clear accountability, address work travel, promote proper hygiene, and limit the opportunity for the virus to spread in your organization.

2. **Monitor updates daily** from reputable health authorities about the spread of COVID-19.

3. **Begin or review crisis management and business continuity planning** for the inevitable impact to your organization as the situation deteriorates globally.

Critical Insight

There is time to prepare for the impact COVID-19 is having – and will have – on organizations worldwide, but the window is closing. The time to prepare your pandemic response plan is now!

Immediate Actions to Take

In addition to crisis management and business continuity planning, all organizations should look to implement the following actions as soon as possible. **See the following slides for more information.**

Communication
Ensure calm by reinforcing the facts and letting employees know you are prepared.

Coordination
Establish a small, empowered team that can act with minimal approval to ensure fast response when needed.

Travel
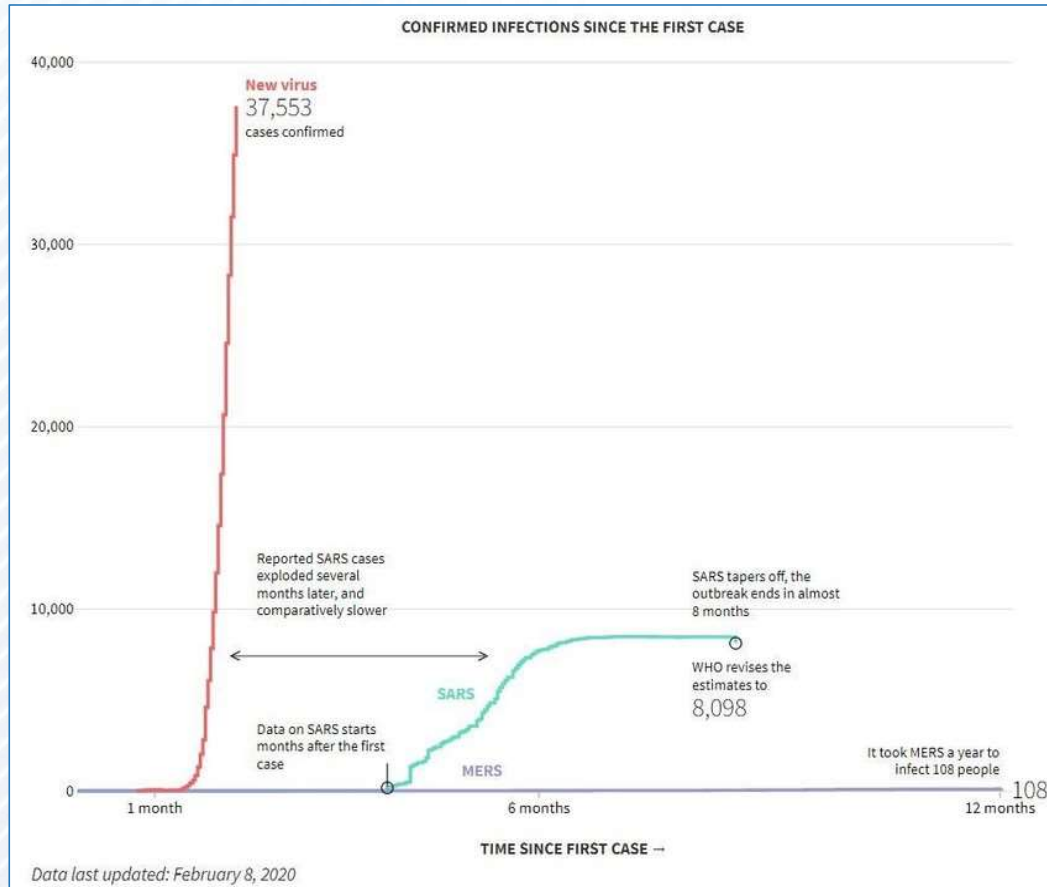Review travel policies to ensure employees are protected.

Hygiene
Take basic precautions that are likely to have the largest impact in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Isolation
Ensure that employees are aware of and encouraged to use existing sick days and work-from-home options in the appropriate circumstances.

We've Been Here Before

CONFIRMED INFECTIONS SINCE THE FIRST CASE

New virus 37,553 cases confirmed

Reported SARS cases exploded several months later, and comparatively slower

SARS tapers off, the outbreak ends in almost 8 months

WHO revises the estimates to 8,098

SARS

Data on SARS starts months after the first case

MERS

It took MERS a year to infect 108 people

108

1 month — 6 months — 12 months

TIME SINCE FIRST CASE →

Data last updated: February 8, 2020

VELOCITY OF THE VIRUS

For the first 1,000 people to be infected,
MERS took **903 days or 2.5 years**

SARS took **130 days**

and the new coronavirus took **48 days**

FATALITY RATE

For every 50 people that were infected,
MERS killed **17 people**

SARS killed **five people**

and the new coronavirus killed **one**

World Economic Forum, as of Feb. 8, 2020.

Most-Impacted Industries

Services
- Travel bans, economic decrease

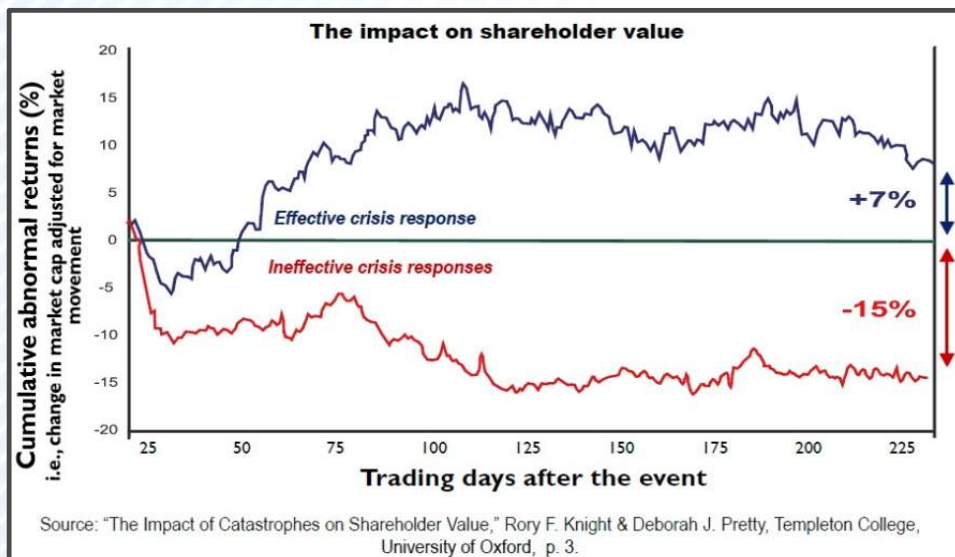## Manufacturing
- Raw materials, shipping

Wholesale
- Products to market, supply chain

938 of the Fortune 1000 Affected

Global complex value chains challenge traditional business continuity planning

- The global economy has created complex, fragile, and singular value supply chains. Companies who do not multisource raw materials or components will feel the biggest impact of travel bans.

- Still, small businesses are not immune: inflexible supply chains can put them out of business quickly.

Business Impact Depends on Crisis Response

The impact on shareholder value

Cumulative abnormal returns (%) i.e., change in market cap adjusted for market movement

Effective crisis response   +7%

Ineffective crisis responses   -15%

Trading days after the event

Source: "The Impact of Catastrophes on Shareholder Value," Rory F. Knight & Deborah J. Pretty, Templeton College, University of Oxford, p. 3.

Have a Crisis Response Plan

Unlike traditional disaster recovery planning, business continuity planning and work-from-home initiatives, this time we know **what** the threat is and **when** it is likely to hit.

There is time to prepare!

Prepare for Three Key Issues

1

Employee Absenteeism

- Key employees' absenteeism
- Mass employee absenteeism
- Employee panic

2

Travel Restrictions

- Restricted travel from quarantined areas
- Impeded travel elsewhere
- Supply chain interruption

3

Downstream Impacts

- Site closures
- Conferences
- Post-pandemic issues

Take Immediate Action

Even if you don't buy the hype, do these things to prepare your organization

1. Form a pandemic response team.

2. Prepare key messages now.

3. Cascade communications to ensure clarity.

4. Establish pandemic travel policies.

5. Identify your critical roles now.

6. Enable work from home via tools like Microsoft Teams, Webex, Slack.

7. Constantly reprioritize your backlog.

8. Use the opportunity to jumpstart BCP.

9. Increase internet bandwidth and VPN connectivity to peak capacity.

10. Begin network and storage modernization.

11. Enable two-factor authentication.

12. Prepare to do a post-pandemic retrospective.

Communication

Employers are one of the most trusted sources of information for staff [1]

- Panic and misinformation are extremely dangerous, and **the first steps taken by an organization should help promote a sense of calm (SHRM).**

- Communication should help **minimize discrimination or stigma** in the workplace by providing employees with access to reputable information (CDC).

- A "living digital document" that can be updated is a good communication tool, as it serves as a single point of reference for employees while allowing the organization to easily add or remove information as the situation changes (Harvard Business Review).

- Initial communications should also **establish how employees should expect further updates to be communicated** and **where they should go for additional information** or questions. Multichannel communication is always preferred, as it will reach a wider audience and reinforce key messages.

1. Edelman

Use Info-Tech's **Crisis Communications Guidelines and Templates** to create your communication plan.

Coordination

Identify and empower a small team to act

- As the situation is changing rapidly, organizations that are characterized by a high degree of bureaucracy need to **ensure decisions and information sharing can happen quickly** to respond to new developments (Harvard Business Review).

- **Create a small cross-functional team** that includes, at minimum, HR, Legal, and IT (Harvard Business Review), as well as a direct report of the CEO. Each organization will require a different composition and may draw on additional functions as needed. Empower this group to communicate and make decisions with minimal oversight (Harvard Business Review), and free the core members of their regular daily tasks (McKinsey & Company).

- Organizations that operate in a variety of regions should also **communicate with local leaders and empower them to accelerate or change their response** based on the local situation in alignment with the overall response plan ("Getting your workplace ready," WHO).

- **Review and update pandemic policies** to speed up response time and ensure coordination across the organization.

Use Info-Tech's **Pandemic Policy** to get started creating, or updating, a comprehensive policy for your organization.

Travel

Review travel requirements
and policies to minimize risk

- **Check local travel advisories** (see sidebar) and ensure planned travel is in accordance with local recommendations.

- Advise employees who are traveling to follow and abide by local health authority instructions.

- If travel to high-risk zones is required, **avoid sending employees who are at higher risk** of severe illness and ensure all employees traveling to these zones are briefed by a health professional ("Getting your workplace ready," WHO).

- If possible, provide employees who are traveling with a small bottle of alcohol-based hand sanitizer ("Getting your workplace ready," WHO).

- **For employees returning from regions with higher infection rates,** consider adopting isolation policies (stay at home or work from home) for 14 days (SHRM) – although this may be controversial. At minimum, **request they monitor themselves for symptoms** by checking their temperature twice a day for 14 days ("Getting your workplace ready," WHO).

- Require employees to check themselves for symptoms before leaving for work travel and to stay at home if they display any of the common symptoms of COVID-19.

COVID-19 Travel Advisory Websites

- United States

- Canada

- United Kingdom
  (or for returning travelers)

- Australia

- European Union

- Mexico

Hygiene

Basic hygiene is one of the best
defenses against infection

- Encourage employees to follow basic hygiene protocols, including:

  o   Washing hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

  o   Avoiding touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

  o   Avoiding close contact with individuals who display symptoms.

  o   Covering coughs or sneezes with tissue or elbow (not hand).

(Government of Canada)

- Ensure sanitizer and soap are present in visible locations and refilled regularly. Also provide tissues and no-touch covered garbage disposals.

- Use promotional materials (see sidebar), health & safety officers, and regular safety briefings (e.g. before any meeting) to highlight proper hygiene protocols.

- Clean surfaces like desks and objects like phones or keyboards regularly with disinfectant. Provide employees with disposal wipes to clean their own workstations.

- Request employees limit physical contact (especially where handshakes or kisses are part of traditional greetings); encourage elbow bumps or bows as an alternative (this is especially important after cases have been detected in an operating region).

Basic Hygiene Promotional Material

- CDC Handwashing Collateral

- CDC Respiratory Illness Prevention Materials

- WHO

  - Wash your hands (1)

  - Wash your hands (2)

  - Protecting others from getting sick (1)

  - Protecting others from getting sick (2)

Isolation

Ensure employees are aware of
existing policies to limit exposure

- **Remind employees about existing sick policies** and encourage any employee who is feeling unwell to stay at home. Where teleworking or work-from-home policies are in place, these should also be highlighted.

    o   Do not request a doctor's note from these employees, as that can contribute to an overloaded healthcare system (CDC).

- **Request organizations that supply contract or temporary workers also encourage their employees to stay at home** if they are feeling unwell and deploy accommodating sick leave policies.

- Create a **plan for employees who arrive at work and are displaying symptoms**. If cases have not been detected in the area, then they should be sent home (CDC). If COVID-19 is present, then they should be isolated in a pre-identified area (e.g. a specific meeting room) and local health authorities contacted immediately ("Getting your workplace ready," WHO).
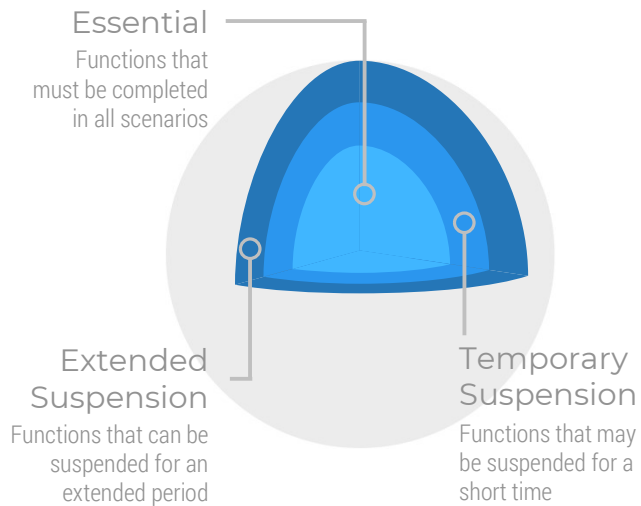

Use Info-Tech's **Crisis Communications Guidelines and Templates** to create your communication plan.

Ensure a Business Continuity Plan Is in Place

Plans should be in place to keep essential functions running. Some experts suggest organizations should be prepared for up to 40% of a workforce to be absent (either sick or caring for others) (CNN).

Essential
Functions that must be completed in all scenarios

Extended Suspension
Functions that can be suspended for an extended period

Temporary Suspension
Functions that may be suspended for a short time

Critical Insight

Communication channels with employees must be identified and shared with employees in advance.

1 Identify essential functions to maintain.

- Identify organizational priorities (which may differ by location).
- Identify critical products or services that must be maintained.
- Identify critical supply chain partners or contractors.

2 Establish a plan to mediate physical absence.

- Establish a list of designates who can fill in for critical employees.
- Determine how the organization will run with a reduced workforce.
- Create a contact list with all employees' emails, phone numbers, and addresses.
- Determine how the organization will run if customers or suppliers can't come to the place of business.

3 Contact supply chain partners.

- Ensure critical partners have their own business continuity plans in place.

Key Takeaways

Takeaway #1

Information about COVID-19 is evolving rapidly; organizations should check for daily updates from their local health authority or the World Health Organization (WHO).

Takeaway #2

Take immediate actions to provide calm and information, assign clear accountability, address work travel, promote proper hygiene, and limit the opportunity for the virus to spread in your organization.

Takeaway #3

Begin planning for more serious outbreaks by reviewing sick leave policies and available benefits, having a plan to respond to COVID-19 symptoms in the workplace, and promoting telecommuting.

Takeaway #4

Business continuity planning requires a cross-functional team, but it's critical that IT leads the process to create the best possible plans.

Critical Insight

Proper handwashing takes 20 seconds; look through this twitter post for a collection of songs you can sing while you're washing your hands!

Related Research

Implement Crisis Management Best Practices

- An effective crisis management plan provides a framework for responding to any crisis, from health and safety incidents to business disruptions to reputational damage.

Develop a Business Continuity Plan

- A business continuity plan knits together every aspect of your organization, making it potentially the most complex project you'll take on.

Develop a Balanced Flexible Work Program

- Flexible work has been shown to have proven benefits for both employees and employers. Organizations that get it right experience higher engagement, job satisfaction, talent attraction, and equal or higher productivity.

Related Research

Modernize the Network

- It is difficult to find a holistic, modern network solution that delivers the services demanded by rapidly changing business and IT needs. Engage stakeholders and conduct a comprehensive evaluation of emerging technologies and current networking concerns to find the best solution for your organization.

Create a Right-Sized Disaster Recovery Plan

- Create an effective, right-sized DRP: discover current capabilities, define business requirements, and close gaps to deliver service continuity.

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