

# Risk Alert



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## Preparing for a pandemic

Health officials are concerned about the potential for the rapid spread of diseases in public gatherings. Houses of worship need to be ready if a significant pandemic illness outbreak occurs. Religious leaders need to be prepared if widespread outbreaks of illness force many to stay home or a localized outbreak causes health officials to shut down a house of worship for a period of time.

### Plan for the possibility of a significant outbreak

Many businesses and schools are planning for the possibility of responding to a public health emergency. A house of worship should be no different. Review your plans to protect the health of your staff, members and guests.



These plans should include:

- Promoting everyday preventative actions, such as hand washing/sanitation hygiene and sneezing etiquette.
- Providing easy access to control supplies, such as soap, hand sanitizers, personal protective equipment (gloves or surgical masks), tissues and general cleaning supplies.
- Developing an alternate communication method with the congregation in the event of an outbreak at your facility. Announcement methods may include email, web postings or telephone trees.
- Keeping informed on local/state plans in the event that civil authority prohibits public gatherings or limits building access during a severe disease outbreak.
- Tracking and reporting a pandemic illness among those who enter the building.
- Planning for the possibility of weeklong employee or volunteer absenteeism. This would include the possibility of temporarily being without key employees, such as pastors and administrators, who were exposed to the virus.
- Preparing for alternative worship practices. This would include nonhandshake greetings, using a single drop location instead of passing offering baskets or attendance pads and individually packaged communion distribution.
- Ensuring that proper food safety practices are followed for food serving events. See the Food Safety *Risk Alert* ([www.churchmutual.com/documents/RAFoodSafety.pdf](http://www.churchmutual.com/documents/RAFoodSafety.pdf)) for more information.

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## Put the plan into action

In a case where a pandemic illness is reported at your facility, notify your local health department immediately. They will share the most current regulations and provide guidelines to follow, depending on the severity of the outbreak at your facility and in your area. This guidance may include the recommendation of closing your facility or cleaning large areas of your facility.

Tracing where this person might have been and how they might have contracted the virus will be beneficial to help limit future exposures and for cleaning purposes. Keep surfaces, such as tables and bathroom counters, toys and shared items, clean by wiping them down with a disinfectant.

## Separate those who are known to be sick

If a sick person is not able to leave immediately, allow them to use a room separate from the common areas. Depending on the illness, persons may be contagious up to seven days after they get sick. Ask those with illness-like symptoms to stay away until they have been symptom free for 24 hours. Stay informed on the latest information. Continue to follow the plan that you have in place, including keeping informed on the latest pandemic information.

The following sites can be used for prevention, treatment and guidance:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regularly updates their information: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or 800-CDC-INFO.
- Department of Health and Human Services: [www.pandemicflu.gov/](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/).
- *Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for an Influenza Pandemic*: <http://osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3327pandemic.pdf>.
- More information on cleaning and United States Environmental Protection Agency registered products: [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov).

**For a complete collection of the *Risk Alert* series, visit our website and look in the Safety Resources section.**