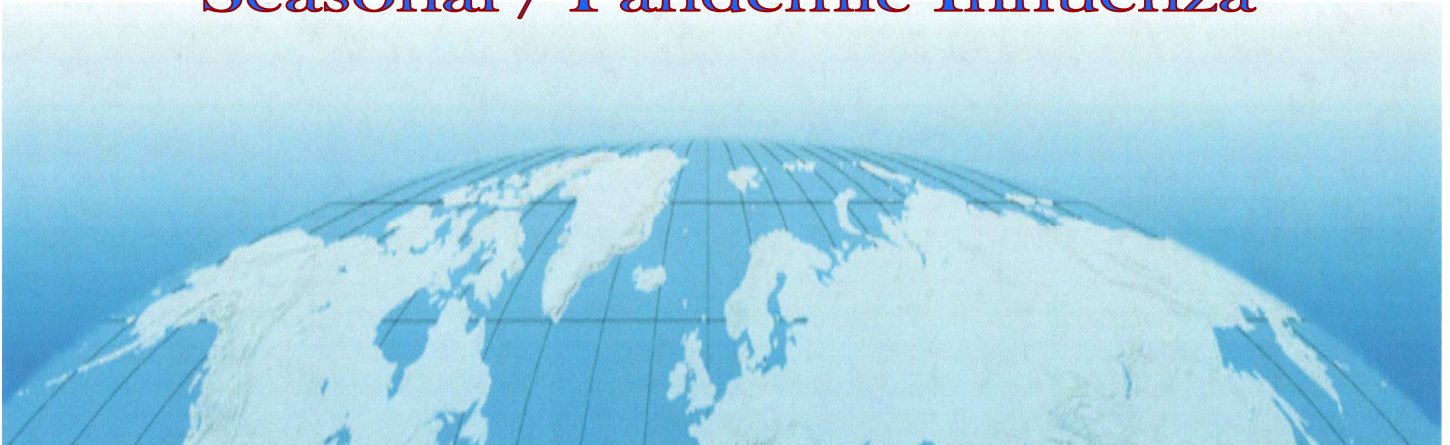




# **DISASTER PREPAREDNESS**

**Faith Based Organization Planning Guide  
Seasonal / Pandemic Influenza**



# Faith Based Organization Planning Guide Seasonal / Pandemic Influenza

Flu refers to illness caused by a number of different influenza viruses. Flu can cause a range of symptoms and effects, from mild to lethal. Flu symptoms may include fever, coughing, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headaches, body aches, chills and fatigue. Most healthy people recover from the flu without problems, but certain people are at high risk for serious complications. Those that are more at risk include children, individuals 65 years of age or older, pregnant women, and people with underlying chronic disease.

Annual outbreaks of seasonal flu usually occur during the late fall through early spring. In a typical year, approximately five to twenty percent of the population will get the flu. A flu pandemic occurs when a new influenza A virus emerges for which there is little to no immunity in the human population; the virus causes serious illness and spreads easily from person-to-person worldwide. Multiple waves of community outbreaks of illness could occur with each wave lasting two to three months. In a severe pandemic, absenteeism attributable to illness, the need to care for ill family members, and fear of infection may reach 40 percent during the peak weeks of a community outbreak. During a pandemic, there will not be a vaccine immediately available; therefore, community strategies that delay or reduce the spread of the disease are critical. Non - pharmaceutical interventions are as simple as frequent hand washing, cough / sneeze etiquette, and frequent disinfection of commonly used areas.

Each flu season, your congregation can help stop the spread of influenza. In an influenza pandemic, your organization plays a key role in protecting everyone's' health and safety as well as limiting the negative impact on the economy and society. As with any catastrophe, having a contingency plan is critical. This guide has been designed to assist congregations with planning efforts associated with continuing operations during a flu pandemic.



# Continuity of Operations: Issues That Should Be Addressed By Your Organization

## 1. Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your organization.

- Identify a pandemic coordinator and/or team with defined roles and responsibilities for preparedness and response planning. Consider forming a “Congregant Response Team (CRT) to assist with operations if critical positions are left vacant due to illness.
- Identify essential employees, key positions, and other critical inputs (e.g. materials, suppliers, products, and logistics) required to maintain operations during a pandemic.
- Prepare workforce by selecting key position lines of succession and developing critical function task sheets.
- Consider your organization’s unique contribution to addressing rumors, misinformation, fear and anxiety.

## 2. Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your employees and congregants:

- Find up-to-date, reliable pandemic information from community public health agency web sites such as [flu.gov](http://flu.gov) or [collierprepares.org](http://collierprepares.org).
- Encourage annual influenza vaccination for your employees and congregation.
- Evaluate employee access to healthcare services (including mental health) during a pandemic and improve services as needed.
- Implement guidelines to modify the frequency and type of face-to-face contact.
- Identify employees and key congregants with special needs, and incorporate the requirements of such persons into your preparedness plan.
- Provide information via newsletters, e-mails, posters, phone messages, websites etc. This information is readily available at [collierprepares.org](http://collierprepares.org).

## 3. Establish policies to be implemented during a pandemic:

- Plan for staff absences due to personal or family illnesses, quarantines, and school, business, and public transportation closures.
- Establish policies for flexible worksite (e.g. telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g. staggered shifts).
- Establish policies for preventing influenza spread at your house of worship. Promote respiratory hygiene / cough and sneeze etiquette, insisting on prompt exclusion of people with influenza symptoms.
- Establish policies for employees who have been exposed to pandemic influenza, are suspected to be ill, or become ill at the worksite. Infection control response is critical, and immediate mandatory sick leave is warranted
- Set up authorities, triggers, and procedures for activating and terminating the organization’s response plan. Consider the potential of suspending hand shaking, communion, or worship services. Conducting services outside may be justified.

## 4. Allocate resources to protect your employees and congregants during a pandemic:

- Provide sufficient and accessible infection control supplies (e.g. hand-hygiene products, tissues and receptacles for their disposal) in all areas of your complex..
- Enhance communications and information technology infrastructures as needed to support employee telecommuting.
- Consult with your insurance or health care provider to ensure availability of medical consultation and advice for ill employees.

## 5. Communicate to and educate your employees and congregants:

- Develop and disseminate programs and materials covering pandemic fundamentals (e.g. signs and symptoms of influenza, modes of transmission), personal and family protection and response strategies (e.g. hand hygiene, coughing/sneezing etiquette).
- Ensure that communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Provide information for the at-home care of ill employees, congregants, and family members.

## **Free**

Develop a Continuity Of Operations Plan (COOP) by identifying essential functions, key positions, and determining lines of succession for those positions. Assistance with COOP planning is provided by the Collier County Health department free of charge. Call 252-2631.

Find up-to-date, reliable pandemic information from community public health agencies such as [pandemicflu.gov](http://pandemicflu.gov) or [collierprepares.org](http://collierprepares.org).

“Just in Time” training is available for your congregants at [collierprepares.org](http://collierprepares.org). Topics include “Influenza 101, Influenza home care, and Respiratory etiquette”.

Create an emergency contact list including employee emergency contact information. Identify those employees or congregants with special needs.

Create a list of critical business contractors and vendors whom you will use in an emergency.

Develop critical function task sheets for the identified key positions and provide opportunities for cross training to increase employee confidence.

Implement guidelines to modify the frequency and type of face-to-face contact (e.g. hand-shaking, communion, limiting or cancelling services) among and between congregants.

Establish policies for preventing influenza spread at the worksite. Promote respiratory hygiene/ cough and sneeze etiquette.

Establish policies for flexible worksite and flexible work hours (e.g. staggered shifts) for employees.

Establish policies for employee compensation and sick-leave absences unique to a pandemic.

Include emergency preparedness planning information during services. Disseminate information to employees and congregants in newsletters, e mails, or other internal communications tools.

Encourage annual influenza vaccination for employees and members of your congregation.

Promote family and individual preparedness among your employees and congregants.

Talk to your staff about your organization’s disaster plans and practice the plans.

## **Minimal \$\$**

Two-way communication is central, before, during and after a disaster. Develop platforms for communicating pandemic status and actions to employees, vendors, suppliers, and congregants. Set up a telephone call tree, password-protected page on the congregation’s Web site, e-mail or call-in voice recording to communicate with employees and congregants.

Provide sufficient and accessible infection control supplies (e.g. hand-hygiene products, tissues and receptacles for their disposal) in all areas of your complex.