

A comprehensive approach for assessing and preparing for an avian flu pandemic



With increasing urgency over the past year, governments, non-governmental organizations, and industry have come to realize the potential dangers of avian influenza, commonly called “bird flu.” Suddenly, the word “pandemic” is on the tongues of world leaders, and many businesses are nervously looking for gaps in their corporate preparedness plans to specifically deal with a PANDEMIC.

A human influenza pandemic represents the extreme end of what risk managers call low-frequency/high-severity events. We know the risk of a pandemic exists, but we won't know the severity of a pandemic until it is over, and unprepared companies will not know how to respond until they are directly affected. A pandemic's worldwide consequences could include:

- *More than seven million deaths from even a mild pandemic (WHO)*
- *25 percent or more of countries' workers needing to take extended sick leave (United Kingdom Department of Health)*
- *Nearly \$1 trillion in worldwide economic damage (The World Bank)*
- *Major disruptions to every industry, particularly those with strong ties to travel, tourism, sports and entertainment, lodging, and healthcare.*

The hardest, hit companies are likely to be those with large staffs, worldwide operations, global supply chains and/or international suppliers and customers. Already some local, state, and national governments are establishing plans to curtail travel and quarantine individuals and communities. Even a relatively mild pandemic could “slow or halt economic growth in Asia and lead to a significant reduction in trade, particularly of services,” according to analysis by the Asian Development Bank.

Senior executives should consider the following steps now, before a pandemic begins:

- *Understand the nature of the disease and the potential means by which it could directly and indirectly affect your staff, operations, resources, reputation, and financial fitness. Ensure that senior managers have the skills to manage such an event before it becomes a crisis.*
- *Review existing corporate preparedness plans, procedures and policies, including ways to control exposure to the virus, human resource policies, communications capabilities, and critical suppliers and vendors.*
- *Regularly contact governments, international agencies, and industry groups about the availability of guidance from which your company and staff could benefit.*
- *Ensure you know what circumstances would trigger invocation of your corporate response plans—what are the key risk indicators?*
- *Review or develop employee health procedures to minimize the potential for transmission of infectious diseases to other workers.*
- *Review the supply chain for your business to understand where and how it might be vulnerable during a pandemic.*
- *Test operational continuity plans regularly. If your company believes that avian flu presents a significant risk, you should consider running exercises using various outbreak scenarios to test your plan's effectiveness.*

Companies should structure their corporate-preparedness plans for a pandemic crisis into four to six escalating action tiers. This process can provide thresholds that lead to increasing efforts to monitor advanced warning information and allow individual facilities, regions, and businesses to detect an emerging event and respond appropriately at each escalated threshold. Tiered planning should provide applicable guidance pertaining to:

- Current company response action procedures
- Identification of clear decision authority to increase preparedness or implement response
- Allocation of company resources
- Health and safety issues and procedures
- Operational responses
- Travel monitoring and alerting to risk changes
- Human resources/benefits involvement
- Internal and external communications
- Communication of medical information and explanation of the risk to employees
- Financial resource allocation and impact modeling
- Government involvement
- Product, facility, IT, and intellectual property security controls.

How Kroll Can Help

Kroll's Corporate Preparedness practice can assist your company in preparing for and responding to the wide range of issues that could emerge from a pandemic event. Working with specialty experts drawn from our sister MMC companies, we offer the expertise and experience to create client-specific solutions that match your employees, your operations, and your objectives for preparedness and risk management.

Kroll will assist your management team by conducting a comprehensive assessment of your pandemic-related policies and response capabilities, melding this information into a framework for a tiered response to any escalation of the threat or impact of the virus. Then, as your need to prepare dictates, we will help you develop capabilities that address the complicated issues involved in managing the pandemic risk, ensuring continuity of your business during and after the pandemic, and responding to the needs of your employees.

Kroll can provide on-site training as well as develop and stage exercises to enhance your teams' performance. We can also provide expertise to assist you in communicating risks to employees and in helping them to understand response procedures. Kroll can also ensure employees, customers, vendors, and others depending on your business are aware that it has taken proper precautions to manage an outbreak.

Kroll offers customized solutions that mature to match your sense of the right level of preparedness.

Because we have assisted many worldwide corporations with planning and response activities, our clients are better prepared and have a better understanding of the risks that threaten their businesses. Moreover, our clients know that should an incident or crisis arise, Kroll has the expertise and resources to help, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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