

These scenarios are designed to stimulate conversations within organisations and networks of what may need to be considered in a variety of different emergency situations. Please feel welcome to use these scenarios in staff meetings or emergency planning workshops to increase awareness of organisational procedures and potentially identify gaps in planning.

For further information and advice please contact your local emergency planning committee through your council or local emergency services.

Practice Scenario: Influenza outbreak

Week 1: With the beginning of the cooler months, several staff members and clients have been noticed to be at work with ‘the sniffles’ that are apparently doing the rounds at the local primary school and childcare centre. 1 or 2 workers are at work sneezing and coughing but claim that they shouldn’t go home because there are deadlines approaching and ‘it sounds worse than I feel’.

You encourage your staff to get their flu vaccine, practice good hygiene and take time off if they are feeling unwell. Certain staff members actively shun the flu vaccine, stating that they don’t work because ‘one time they had the flu shot and got the flu anyway’ while others state that they’re only for old people and they’re healthy enough to fight it off. Towards the end of the week, some staff members are calling in sick with ‘flu-like symptoms’ which causes you to need to adjust others work duties and rosters to ensure services continue.



Week 2: After the weekend it appears that nearly half of the staff are in the midst of varying levels of illness. Multiple staff members have called in sick, leaving those that are left to carry the load. Some staff have come back into the office but are not fully recovered yet, leading to their reduced productivity and increasing the potential for germs to circulate to the healthy staff members.

The local Aged Care facility has implemented a quarantine, not allowing visitors as several residents have been struck down with the flu, with some needing to be hospitalised.

Week 3: Over the past few weeks, the majority of staff members have now taken time off work either because they themselves are sick or they are looking after others who are sick. This has put a great deal of strain on your organisation to continue to function at full capacity. Numbers of hospitalisations due to the flu have increased in the local area and the school has closed for the remainder of the week due to the numbers of unwell teachers and students causing disarray for many families.

Week 4: The young daughter of one of your staff members who is immunocompromised has been admitted to hospital with pneumonia after they caught the flu. It is uncertain when they will be back at work. Staff members are slowly returning to the office but many are still

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fatigued and many projects are behind schedule.

For your workplace, consider the following:

- What advice and duties will you be giving your staff?
- What (if any) messages will you be communicating to your clients/ customers/ community members and when?
- How will you manage with reduced staffing capacity? What services will be essential to maintain? Are there any that will be delayed or cancelled?

In the case of a flu epidemic, remember that:

- The flu can result in hospitalisations and death at any age, with the elderly, pregnant women, young children and those living with chronic health conditions at particular risk.
- The incubation period for the flu ranges from 1-4 days (average of 2 days) and the infectious period can last up to 7 days. So even if you start to feel better you may still be contagious.
- Symptoms of the flu can last 2-3 weeks (particularly fatigue).
- Timing of your flu vaccine is important as it can start to wear off after 3-4 months. Flu season in the past few years has peaked in August so getting immunised too early can leave people exposed later in the season. Seek advice from your GP.
- In 2018, an extra 3.4 million flu vaccinations were made available to vulnerable groups. Reducing the death toll from 1137 deaths in 2017 to just 73 in 2018. It also reduced the number of reported cases of flu from nearly 250,000 in 2017 to 53,000 in 2018.

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