

**PANDEMIC  
COVID-19  
PREPAREDNESS  
PLAN**



**TOWN OF VARNVILLE**

**Contingency Plan for  
Mitigating the Spread of  
Pandemic COVID-19  
VIRUS**

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## INTRODUCTION

Pandemic influenza viruses are unique in their ability to cause infection in all age groups on a global scale. The importance of influenza viruses as biological threats is due to a number of factors, including the high transmissibility, the vast reservoir of novel variants (primarily aquatic birds), the unique properties of the viral genome, and their ability to cause severe disease and death.

- 1918-19, "Spanish flu," [A (H1N1)], caused the highest number of known influenza deaths. (However, the actual influenza virus subtype was not detected in the 1918-19 pandemic). More than 500,000 people died in the United States, and up to 50 million people may have died worldwide. Many people died within the first few days after infection, and others died of secondary complications. Nearly half of those who died were young, healthy adults. Influenza A (H1N1) viruses still circulate today after being introduced again into the human population in 1977.
- 1957-58, "Asian flu," [A (H2N2)], caused about 70,000 deaths in the United States. First identified in China in late February 1957, the Asian flu spread to the United States by June 1957.
- 1968-69, "Hong Kong flu," [A (H3N2)], caused about 34,000 deaths in the United States. This virus was first detected in Hong Kong in early 1968 and spread to the United States later that year. Influenza A (H3N2) viruses still circulate today.
- 2009, "Swine Flu," [A (H1N1)], is a new flu virus that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) first detected in the U. S. in April 2009. In June 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that an H1N1 pandemic is underway which means this infectious disease is spreading among people throughout the world.

Pandemic influenza-COVID-19 is a unique public health emergency and community disaster.

Outbreaks are expected to occur simultaneously throughout much of the U.S., preventing relocation of human and material resources. The effect of COVID-19 on individual communities will be relatively prolonged – six to eight weeks – when compared to the minutes-to-hours observed in most other natural disasters.

## **PLAN OBJECTIVES**

In response to an COVID-19 pandemic, the Town of Varnville has prepared this plan to meet the following objectives:

1. Establish departmental service continuity plans in the event of pandemic COVID-19 in order to insure delivery of basic Town services.
2. Mitigate the spread of pandemic COVID-19 among employees.
3. Assist employees and their families in managing personal and/or family illnesses during a pandemic COVID-19 outbreak.

The KEY priority will be ensuring that essential Town operations continue. Each department must develop a list of service priorities and then develop plans for meeting those priorities.

Managing the pandemic—focusing on continuity of operations with considerable loss of staff, depleted resources, a struggling economy, and a nervous public—will be a considerable challenge. Planning increases the likelihood that the Town will be able to continue service operations during a global health crisis.

## **ASSUMPTIONS**

A COVID-19 pandemic is unlike any crisis the Town has encountered. No one can predict when it might arrive, where it might strike, how long it might last, and how serious its impacts might be. Caution requires that the Town assume and plan for a worst-case scenario. Accordingly, the Town's Pandemic COVID-19 Preparedness Plan is based on the following assumptions:

1. As many as 30 to 40 percent of the Town's employees could become ill at the pandemic's peak; another 50 percent may refuse to report to work, either because they fear becoming ill or because they are caring for afflicted family members.
2. The government will not be able to perform all functions and provide all services at full capacity throughout the pandemic.
3. Any office may be closed due to staffing shortages or community quarantine.
4. Mutual Aid from other jurisdictions will not be available. Town of Varnville employees, who do not have critical or essential duties, will most likely have to be reassigned to other areas to assist.
5. Health-care workers and other first responders will likely be at even higher risk of exposure and illness than the general population, further impeding the care of victims.

6. Effective preventive and therapeutic measures, including vaccines and antiviral agents, may not be available or effective. Antibiotics to treat secondary infections will likely be delayed and in short supply.

7. The projected peak transmission period for a pandemic outbreak will be 6 to 8 weeks. At least two pandemic disease waves are likely. Absenteeism will be in waves/cycles based on the duration of virus.

## **PREVENTING FLU SPREAD AT WORKSITE**

**Promoting respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette:** The Town of Varnville will promote hygiene through a variety of methods to help reduce the spread of the virus at the worksite. Though respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette are simple concepts, during a pandemic they become a vital defense to a potentially dangerous outbreak. Limit the number of “commonly touched” items such as candy dishes, groups of pens or pencils on the counters, etc.

Since indirect transmission (e.g. from hand-to-hand, or hand to contaminated object and then contaminated object to hand) is the main way in which influenza is passed from person to person, educational programs will reiterate the need for routine and frequent hand washing. Washing with plain soap, hand sanitizer lotion, alcohol or other antiseptic-based hand wash products eliminates the virus. It is important to wash hands even if protective gloves have been worn. *Gloves are not a substitute for hand washing.*

Masks will be placed in each department such that they are readily available to staff. Even with the mask, employees should cover the mouth when coughing or sneezing and wash/sanitize their hands immediately thereafter. Coughing etiquette now is to cough into your shoulder or elbow, avoiding your hands altogether. Additionally, all employees should avoid/reduce close contact with the public or other employees. The telephone or e-mail should be used to communicate whenever possible.

The Town will also:

1. Disseminate information on the virus and how it is spread.
2. Disseminate information to employees on proper hygiene methods and other behavior activities and/or restrictions that will reduce the risk of spreading the flu virus among the workforce.
3. Post educational materials to remind employees of proper cough etiquette, hand washing, and other behaviors that will reduce the risk of infection.
4. Provide information to employees to assist them in protecting themselves and their families during a pandemic.

## **EMPLOYEES EXPOSED OR SUSPECTED OF EXPOSURE**

Employees should be conscious of their own health; those who experience any flu like symptoms should notify their immediate supervisor and stay home. If symptoms begin at work, employees should notify their immediate supervisor of the potential exposure and go home.

Employees exhibiting two or more flue-like symptoms may be sent home immediately by their supervisor.

## **GUIDELINES TO MODIFY FREQUENCY AND TYPE OF FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT**

**Face-to-Face:** In face-to-face meetings, individuals should limit contact. Participants should practice staying about three (3) feet apart.

**Hand-Shaking:** Employees should stop shaking hands if there is a pandemic influenza outbreak to help reduce the spread of the disease. If employees find themselves shaking hands, they should practice increased hand hygiene.

**Meetings:** Employees should limit attendance at meetings. Meetings should be suspended when the same information can be obtained with a conference call, e-mail, or through chat groups over the internet. If a face-to-face meeting is necessary, following the rules may help ensure that transmission of the virus is limited:

1. The room should be cleaned and disinfected using good house keeping techniques such as disinfecting the table, chairs, phones, and other places that one might be expected to touch.
2. Prop the door open (when doing so would not breach security) to keep employees and the public from touching the door knob.
3. Spread out as much as possible and avoid hand shaking.
4. Minimize the length of meetings.
5. Meet in large rooms.
6. Require all employees to wash their hands after leaving meetings.
7. Clean the room after each use.

**Increase Social Distancing:** Social distancing means minimizing human-to human contact in peak phases of pandemic influenza. Contacts are those persons who have had close (one yard or less) physical or confined airspace contact with an infected person within four days of that person developing symptoms. These are likely to include family members and/or other living companions, workmates (if in confined airspace environments) and possibly recreational companions. The Town of Varnville may cancel or postpone all Town sponsored meetings/events during a pandemic. The Town will encourage the use of technology to

facilitate social distancing by using communications networks, remote access and web access to maintain distance among employees and between employees and citizens whenever possible.

## **INFECTION CONTROL SUPPLIES**

**Hand-hygiene products, tissues, disposal receptacles:** The Town will identify the products or supplies needed, the sources from which to obtain them, and maintain an inventory of those items, such as hand sanitizer, tissue paper, masks, and other personal protective equipment items for use by employees in their work area. Any indication of an increased threat level will result in an automatic audit and review of inventory levels.

**Availability of medical consultation and advice:** The Town will use a combination of sources for medical consultation and advice, including the Center for Disease Control (CDC), web based and information formats, and DHEC. An increase in the threat alert level will trigger a review to determine if medical consultation is necessary.

## **ADMINISTRATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

**Trigger Events:** The following events will be considered “trigger events” for implementation of all or portions of this plan:

1. The United States Federal Government through their official agencies issues a pandemic declaration for the United States, and/or
2. The State of South Carolina issues a pandemic declaration for the State, and/or
3. The Mayor of the Town of Varnville or his designee declares a pandemic emergency for the Town, and/or
4. DHEC issues a directive to implement a response plan, and/or
5. Excessive employee absenteeism occurs that results in the Town being in jeopardy of experiencing a pandemic related operations emergency, and/or
6. There is confirmation of large scale employee exposure to pandemic pathogens. Once a pandemic crisis is imminent or has occurred, the Mayor will activate the Town of Varnville COVID-19 Plan.

**Pandemic COVID-19 Crisis Assessment:** Upon notification of a pandemic COVID-19 crisis, the Pandemic Leadership Team (Mayor, Chief of Police, Fire Chief and Department Heads) will meet to:

1. Make an initial risk determination to define the extent of the crisis and determine what portions of the program need to be implemented based on that analysis.

2. Continually assess the severity of the crisis, the efficacy of the Town's response and determine whether changes need to be made. If members are unable to physically meet due to governmental limitations on travel or quarantine, meetings will be held by conference call.

3. Make a determination regarding the cancellation of public meetings and, in conjunction with the Judge, Municipal Court.

**Compensation:** During a pandemic, the Town may require all employees who get a physical paycheck to receive that check through direct payroll deposit.

**Return to work after illness:** Before returning to work after illness, employee's fever must have subsided below 100 degrees for at least a 24 hours period.

**Travel restrictions:** During a declared pandemic outbreak, the following travel policy will be instituted:

1. Upon the announcement by the Governor or other authorized public health official that the State of South Carolina is subject to a pandemic COVID-19 outbreak, all work related travel will immediately be suspended.

2. If travel is imminent and refunds cannot or will not be made, the Mayor may decide to allow the employee to take the prearranged trip if the employee is not exhibiting any symptoms and the employee reports no significant, recent exposures to the flu virus.

3. If an announcement of a pandemic outbreak is made by the Mayor of the Town of Varnville or his designee, the same travel ban will be implemented.

4. If an employee lives in a community that has been declared a pandemic zone by its local government, health department or other responsible entity, or is otherwise quarantined due to such an outbreak, the employee shall notify his/her department head of the announcement as soon as practical. The affected employee should refrain from travel to and from the workplace until the quarantine is lifted and the employee is not exhibiting any symptoms.

## **TELECOMMUTING AND FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES**

1. Participation in telecommuting during a pandemic may be mutually agreed upon by the employee and the department director. The employee's position must be identified as telecommuting capable. The Mayor may, however, require an employee to telecommute, where practical, to reduce the risk of spreading the flu virus at the worksite. This will be determined on a case by case basis as work site conditions and the health status of an employee warrant.

2. Telecommuters may cease their participation in the program at any time, unless they are required to work in the program due to illness or other worksite separation needs. These will be determined by the employee's department director. The department director may cancel the agreement at any time when it is determined that continuation would not be productive, efficient or in the best interest of the Town.



3. Telecommuters will be compensated as if duties were being performed at the in Town work location. Overtime may not be worked unless authorized in advance by the department director.

4. Telecommuters are subject to the same rules and procedures as other employees and are covered by worker's compensation when performing official work duties at the alternate work site.

5. Telecommuters must verify in writing that their home provides work space that is free of safety and fire hazards and agree that the Mayor will be held harmless against any and all claims, excluding worker's compensation claims that result from working at a home office.

6. No employee engaged in telecommuting may conduct face-to-face business from home.

7. The Town of Varnville is not required to provide equipment for telecommuting; however, the Town may provide all or part of the equipment necessary for completing work assignments, including the installation and maintenance of Town-owned equipment at the employee's home. The Town will not cover the cost of repair or maintenance of the telecommuter's personal equipment. Equipment needs will be determined by the department's need during the pandemic event on a case-by-case basis.

8. The Town will establish security controls and conditions for use of Town equipment. The telecommuting employee must use approved safeguards to protect Town equipment and supplies. All official Town records, files and documents must be protected from unauthorized disclosure or damage and returned safely to the office at the conclusion of the telecommuting assignment.

9. Employees on probation or on a performance improvement plan are not eligible for telecommuting. Exceptions may be made if warranted due to the pandemic crisis.

**Procedures:** Employees interested in participating in the telecommuting program during a pandemic crisis should contact their supervisor to discuss the feasibility of telecommuting. They must hold a position that the Town approves for telecommuting. If the employee and the position are deemed suitable for telecommuting, a Telecommuting Agreement must be signed by the telecommuter, the department director and the Mayor prior to beginning the program. Exceptions may be made to facilitate emergency situations under the pandemic event as determined by the department director.

## **FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULE**

Work schedules will be determined by the service needs of the department/division and will be managed accordingly. Once schedules are defined and communicated to employees, an employee who requests a deviation to that schedule must do so in writing to the department head for approval. The department head will determine an appropriate schedule for an employee to best fit the needs of the department during a pandemic influenza event. The department head may require employees to change work schedules in order to reduce the risk of the pandemic

influenza spreading at the work site. All Town employees are subject to recall as necessary during an emergency or in the event of a pending emergency situation. The department head may develop alternative work schedules for one or more employees with approval of the Mayor.

## **EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION PLAN – PANDEMIC INFLUENZA**

To ensure effective emergency communications, the Administration will ensure the following activities:

1. Set-up a system to track pandemic flu related absences.
2. Provide a notification for supervisors listing absent employees.

## **DEVELOPMENT AND DISSEMINATION OF MATERIALS**

**COVID-19 Pandemic fundamentals:** The Town will do the following to keep employees up to date on the pandemic:

1. Relay information to employees through the Town web site, e-mail, and phone calls to employees at their homes, if requested.
2. Develop and distribute flyers containing accurate and up-to-date information about the situation.
3. Provide a central bulletin board in Town facilities to post information.

## **CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS**

**Goals:** It is the policy of the Town of Varnville to provide the best level of services possible to its citizens and economic partners in and around the Town. During a Pandemic Flu Emergency, some Town services may have to be rescheduled or curtailed due to insufficient personnel.

**Management:** Town of Varnville personnel are under the overall command of the Mayor or his/her designee.

Department Heads will provide the Mayor's office with staffing reports. Department heads will assist with the coordination of cross departmental personnel assignments.

Reassigned personnel will be under the direct supervision of the department to which they are assigned.

Departments with critical functions requiring specialized pre-event training are responsible for scheduling and conducting such training prior to the use of temporary staff.

**Continuity of Government:** The following order of succession shall be utilized:

Town Council – Mayor  
Mayor Pro-Temp  
Town Council members in order of seniority time on council

Town Government – Mayor  
Chief of Police  
Chief of Fire Dept  
Department Heads in order of seniority

## **ESSENTIAL CITY SERVICES**

The following Town Departments have been identified as providing essential health and public safety services. These services shall continue to be provided, or provided in part, even during emergencies and/or periods of low staffing.

### **POLICE:**

- Provide essential law enforcement functions. Non-emergency calls, which do not require an officer response, may be deferred until staffing levels permit follow-up.
- Assist with security, access control, and traffic control measures in and around hospitals, treatment sites, dispensing centers, clinics, and pharmaceutical warehouse operations as requested by and as possible based on staffing.
- Assist with distribution and enforcement of public health orders to include, quarantine measures and restrictions on travel as possible based on staffing.

### **ADMIN:**

- Provide frequent news releases about changes in Town services.
- Assist with communication of educational messages to the public regarding the conditions the public can expect to experience during a pandemic.
- Communicate educational messages regarding influenza prevention, surveillance and treatment to the media and the public.
- Disseminate public information about disease prevention measures.
- Communicate restrictions on travel, trade, and the prohibition of large public gatherings.
- Maintain rumor control.
- Communicate the lifting/revocation of public health orders that are no longer necessary.
- Add updates to the Town web site.

### **DEPARTMENT HEADS AND ADMINISTRATION:**

- Train Town of Varnville personnel in basic prevention practices including frequent hand washing, respiratory protection and avoiding exposure to persons who might be infected.
- Coordinate medical care to Town Employees working with other healthcare partners.
- Assist in providing emergency operational plan tasks and safety issues for Town employees as well as communities.

- Provide employee benefits support.

**MAYOR-ADMIN:**

- Ensure the ability of the Town to purchase and pay for goods and services as necessary.
- Communicate with Court defendants regarding rescheduling of appearances and trials.
  
- Ensure the Town's computer network stays operational.
- Provide Police and General Services support.

**GENERAL SERVICES**

- Maintain reasonable garbage and refuse collection
- Complete the various task and maintenance procedures
- Maintain on call statues

**SUPPORT FUNCTIONS**

All other Town of Varnville Departments are identified as support functions during emergency periods of low staffing. Personnel may be temporarily reassigned to ensure that critical services are provided.

