

## Business Continuity Planning for an Influenza Pandemic: Case Study from a Medical Devices Company

### Introduction

This case study is one of ten written as a part of a study undertaken on *Business Continuity Planning for an Influenza Pandemic*. The objective is to raise awareness among business enterprises in Ireland of the need for business continuity planning (BCP) for the possible arrival of a 'flu pandemic in Ireland.

The case study is based on a composite of more than one real company.

### Background

1. The business is a medical devices operation based in the West of Ireland. It is part of an international group. It produces medical devices used in surgery.
2. Corporate headquarters has asked the business to develop a plan for business continuity in the event of an influenza pandemic. It has offered some guidance, but the plan is to be developed locally. The business is in a position to consult with other manufacturing operations in the corporation.

### 1: Planning Activities

1. A team has been appointed to develop a plan for business continuity in the event of an influenza pandemic. It is led by Human Resources because the key issues expected to arise relate to the availability of people, and to their welfare.
2. The plan will be subject to approval by plant management, and by corporate headquarters.
3. Elements of the plan will be triggered by reference to the World Health Organisation pandemic alert framework. Other elements will be triggered by perceptions of the immediate threat in Ireland and in other locations in which the corporation has a presence, informed by guidance from health authorities in those places.
4. The plant draws supplies from international sources both within and outside the corporation. It also has a small number of local suppliers. The team has approached the key suppliers to discuss their preparedness and resilience in the face of the threat of a pandemic.
5. The business envisages consulting, and sharing best practice, with other members of its industry Association.

### 2: Issues to be Addressed

1. The business is looking at likely demand for its products during a pandemic. The majority of the demand stems from elective surgery, and part from emergency surgery. The likelihood is that many of the hospitals that use its products will cut back heavily on elective surgery, only admitting the most urgent cases. This will be partly a matter of avoiding exposing elective patients to the risk of infection by influenza in the hospital, and partly because the capacity is needed to cope with emergency admissions of severe influenza cases. Some hospitals may cancel elective surgery entirely during peak phases of the pandemic. Some specialist hospitals may be able to keep elective surgery going.

A complicating factor is that hospitals hold inventories. It is not clear to what extent they will replenish them during peak phases of a pandemic, or allow them to run down as they focus their administrative resources on more urgent tasks.

2. Employee absences will have a direct impact on production capacity. Much of the work is labour intensive, manual assembly work.
3. The working environment gives rise to concerns about employees infecting each other. The majority of the work is done in a clean room environment, with workers sitting close together in rows. Existing clothing designed to protect products and the clean room environment from contamination may afford some protection, as may the efficient air extraction system. There are possibly greater risks at crowded shared entrances, and in the canteen, which is also typically crowded.
4. There are some concerns about the supply of inputs. Staff absences could affect suppliers' production capacity. It is possible that some small suppliers might not be able to continue production, where they depend on having most of their employees present in order to operate.
5. There is a concern about whether adequate sterilisation capacity would continue to be available in Ireland. The business contracts out sterilisation of its products. It is possible that staff absences in the event of a pandemic could lead to a reduction in available sterilisation capacity.
6. It is anticipated that air freight would continue to operate between Ireland, the US and other key locations for sourcing inputs and for product sales.
7. It would be possible to suspend most international travel in the event of a pandemic without major disruption. It would be possible to conduct necessary business by telephone, Internet and videoconferencing.

### 3: Measures to Underpin Continuity

1. The company already has a system of deputies that will continue to function if key staff are absent during a pandemic.
2. Most staff are cross-trained sufficiently well to allow them to move between product lines. Production processes are well documented and well structured, so it would not take long to train a skilled employee to move to a product that they were unfamiliar with.
3. The company has developed policies in sick leave and compassionate leave to be applied during a pandemic. The main difference from normal sick leave policies is that they recognise that there will be times during a pandemic when it will not be possible for employees to obtain a medical certificate, and that they emphasise the need to be cautious about attending work with symptoms that could be from influenza.
4. There is an emergency communications plan in place that allows the human resources department to arrange for all staff to be contacted by telephone if necessary.
5. The business expects to suspend all foreign travel during the main phases of a pandemic, and to operate very low levels of foreign travel for the duration of a pandemic.
6. The business plans to work with small Irish suppliers to encourage them to prepare for business continuity in the event of an influenza pandemic.

7. The business is contacting suppliers located in other countries to confirm that they are putting appropriate plans in place, and to obtain agreement that it will be accorded sufficient priority for supplies during a pandemic.
8. The business is looking at the possibility of building up increased inventories if a pandemic appears imminent (Level 5 in the World Health Organisation alert framework).

#### 4: Response to Workplace Risk

1. In the event of a pandemic, there will be a heavy emphasis in employee communications on the need for employees to refrain from entering the workplace if they have possible symptoms of influenza.
2. The business will introduce guidelines on hygienic behaviour for employees in the event of a pandemic. Employees are accustomed to compliance with detailed rules for behaviour.
3. The business is considering whether to acquire a supply of disposable N95 face masks for use during an influenza pandemic. They may be more practicable in this industry than in others because employees are accustomed to wearing specialist clothing. The business is investigating how effective face masks would be in a clean room environment, and how many would be needed per employee per day, before making a decision.
4. A stockpile of materials has been established for cleaning and hand hygiene (including alcohol-based washes) in the event of a pandemic.
5. The business is exploring ways to reduce crowding at entrances and in the canteen. It is looking at how it might approach staggering shift starting times, finishing times and break times. It is considering how it might manage shift working in the event of a pandemic, so as to reduce numbers present.
6. There is already a heavy emphasis on cleanliness in the workplace. In the event of a pandemic, cleaning practices will be changed to focus more on cleaning surfaces that may be contaminated with the virus.

#### Challenges of Planning for a 'Flu Pandemic

The biggest challenges this business faces in planning for a pandemic are in striking the right balance. If demand for the business's products falls during a pandemic, then significant absences might not be a problem provided that the market dip and the absences happened at around the same time. However, it is unlikely that waves of peak infection will hit both Ireland and the business's main markets at exactly the same time.

Deciding on what measures to plan to protect employees from infection in the workplace also requires striking a balance on disruptive measures such as staggering of entry and exit.

#### Conclusion

This business is planning effectively for an influenza pandemic, and is carefully evaluating the advantages and disadvantages to different measures to limit the risk of infection in the workplace in the event of a pandemic.