



GTconsult Pandemic Business Continuity Planning

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Introduction

This guideline provides information to employees and clients on how GTconsult manages the occupational health and safety (OHS) risks associated with an infectious (communicable) disease pandemic.

This guide outlines our framework using risk management principles and has general advice on workplace health and safety issues as an addendum to our business continuity plans.

This guide is designed to provide basic information to assist employees and clients to understand the duties and contingencies in place for such a pandemic.

What is a Pandemic

A pandemic is the worldwide spread of disease. Outbreaks of new infectious diseases can cause more severe illness than other diseases already circulating in the population due to a lack of immunity to the new disease. This lack of immunity may also increase the pandemic potential of the new disease.

The Department of Health's Chief Medical Officer can declare that a pandemic is affecting South Africa and decide which of the communicable disease frameworks the health sector will use to contain and manage the spread of the pandemic.

As with any infectious illness, standard health and safety risk assessment and controls should be applied. General advice is provided to employees, such as staying at home if they are sick, covering their coughs and sneezes, washing their hands regularly, and any unwell employees with compatible symptoms (to those of the declared pandemic disease) should be sent home.

Community impact of a pandemic

In the event of South Africa experiencing a pandemic, and depending on the severity and transmissibility of the pathogen, large scale community, social and business disruption may occur.

Workplace impact of a pandemic

A pandemic may cause significant absenteeism across all workforces, due to employees being ill, or needing to take leave to look after sick family members. Some staff may also not wish to come to work simply out of fear of becoming ill. This represents a significant threat to the usual conduct of business and will demand prioritising essential services, and adjusting of our work practices and staffing arrangements to maintain business continuity.

Factors affecting attendance may include:

- very high absenteeism due to illness or caring for family
- absence based on fear and anxiety
- stringent infection control measures in both the community and the workplace
- reduced transport
- impact of possible deaths and serious illness among families, friends and work colleagues

It is not possible to predict the timing of the onset of a pandemic so it is imperative that our team prepare beforehand by understanding the pandemic business continuity plans.

GTconsult's duty of care

Under the OHS Act, employers are required to take all reasonably practicable steps to protect the health and safety at work of their employees.

Measures to ensure the health and safety of employees, and subsequently clients, are the driving force behind the business continuity planning for pandemic.



Consultation with employees

An initial step for GTconsult is the consultation with their employees when assessing a risk to the health and safety of employees at any workplace under the GTconsult's control.



Employer and Employee Obligations

GTconsult, as a progressive cloud based service provider business, is taking the approach of extending their remote business as usual approach to an Pandemic scenario that we find ourselves in. Prior consultation has happened with employees in the selection and application of control measures.

In absence of a health and safety committee, GTconsult will take the states lead in identifying the risk and mitigation timelines and approach to risk management.

Duties of employees

Employees also have duties to co-operate with GTconsult in implementing and enforcing the risk control measures. They must take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure they don't do anything that creates or increases a risk to the health and safety of themselves or others.

In a pandemic situation it is reasonable to expect that these obligations placed on the employee and employer will include complying with public health advice and any emergency measures.

GTconsult Practice in the case of a Pandemic

GTconsult business continuity plan is a contingency plan of action to manage the business risk of a particular event.

We follow the below practices in planning for a pandemic:

1. keep informed and up-to-date on pandemic information
2. educate and keep employees up to date
3. undertake risk management by managing the direct and indirect risks
4. incorporate state preparations and risk control measures into a business continuity plan
5. review and evaluate risk control measures
6. plan and manage the recovery phase of a pandemic

Keep informed and up-to-date on pandemic information

Information on pandemic issues is readily available and regularly updated.

It is important to regularly review pandemic information and use it to update your business continuity plan.

Our COO has been assigned responsibility for monitoring pandemic information.

Keep employees up-to-date

All employees will need accurate and current information on the workplace risks associated with a pandemic, as well as clear advice and education on how these risks will be controlled or minimised.

Employees will be provided with information on the nature of the disease, where they can get information, and actions they can take in the workplace to help control risks.

Employees will also be informed on how they will be consulted and advised on the issues of work attendance and work arrangements.

Undertake risk management

As part of planning and preparedness, risk management will be applied to pandemic health and safety risks. This involves identifying and assessing the likely risks at the workplace and those risks associated with the way work is performed. Risk control measures will follow our business as usual remote work procedures and will also be enriched through state led protocol.

Risk Mitigation Measures

The OHS risks during a pandemic can be loosely categorised as the direct risks of infection and the indirect risks arising from changes to usual work arrangements.

Managing the direct risks of infection

Workplace measures to minimise disease transmission and prevent infection are based on an understanding of how the disease is transmitted from person to person.

In the event of a pandemic GTconsult will deploy the following measures:

Social distancing

A primary transmission control measure is social distancing, that is reducing and restricting physical contact and proximity. GTconsult plans to encourage the following measures:

- allowing only identified, essential employees to attend the workplace
- all staff are to, where possible, utilise their work from home allowance
- discouragement of handshaking, and other physical contact in the workplace or at clients
- maintaining a minimum distance of one metre between employees in the workplace (person-to-person droplet transmission is very unlikely beyond this distance)
- moving all meetings to Microsoft Teams cloud based meetings.
- Stopping all social gatherings at or for work, including informal spontaneous congregations
- using telephone and video conferencing to communicate with clients.

Staff Travel

Staff will be encouraged not to travel, however should travel be required, all staff returning from an infected area, or potential threat area, on return will be required to work remotely, without contact to other staff, until the recommended safe period as stipulated by the state in terms of the specific pandemic.

Hygiene and use of personal protective equipment


Transmission can be reduced by undertaking additional cleaning at the workplace and supporting good personal hygiene.

GTconsult will provide information (Appendix A) and resources to employees to reinforce and support good personal hygiene. Hand and respiratory hygiene training shall be provided.

Unwell employees with pandemic-like symptoms are required not to be at work. If an employee develops symptoms while at work, they will be advised to go home.

Appoint a pandemic disease manager

As part of planning for pandemic diseases, GTconsult has identified their EXEC team to manage the pandemic lead by their COO as the pandemic disease's manager (and backup of our IT Director). All



preparation activities and management of the implementation of risk control systems will be directed by this team.

In the event of a pandemic, the Execs and manager(s) are responsible for control of entry to the workplace and managing the situation when employees become ill at work.

Control entry to the workplace

All offices have biometric control entry and can be used for restricting entry to the workplace of persons who may have been infected with a pandemic disease or who have a relatively high risk of contracting it.

Based on medical advice, GTconsult and employees will comply with exclusion periods for employees who are exposed to the infectious disease, show symptoms, are ill or have returned from travel to pandemic-affected areas. This may include taking an employee's temperature prior to allowing them entry to the workplace.

Management of employees becoming ill at work

Employees who report or show compatible symptoms will be:

- isolated from others and referred to a medical practitioner for medical assessment, and
- required to leave the workplace immediately.

Should be required arrangements will be made for their transport either to a doctor or to their home.

A record will be kept of those who become ill and leave the workplace and the people they have had close or casual contact with will need to be assessed.

When a person with suspected infection has left the workplace GTconsult will ensure that their workstation, work area and communal areas they have been in are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

Ventilation and air conditioning

GTconsult will confirm with building owners of their premises that the air conditioning system is properly designed and maintained.

All internal spaces will be monitored to be well ventilated and if possible, fresh air should be allowed to flow.

Manage the indirect risks arising from changes to usual work arrangements

A pandemic will demand significant changes to work arrangements, and these new arrangements will introduce health and safety risks for employees.

Anxiety among employees

GTconsult will seek to minimise this risk through the following control measures:

- providing employees with definitive advice about the relevant pandemic disease, and the risks and control measures in place to address the risks at the workplace
- promoting a supportive workplace

Employees not being aware of current arrangements

Employees should be kept informed on the pandemic situation and changed work arrangements while at work and at home. Effective communication strategies will include:

- regular briefings at work
- advice on the internet

Unfamiliar work and higher workloads

Employees may need to be reassigned to priority tasks that are unfamiliar to them.

Control measures for these risks include:

- consultation with affected employees
- online training
- clear performance expectations
- close supervision and support

Review and evaluate control measures

OHS risk control measures will be regularly reviewed and updated as required. Additional enhancements based on state interjection will be recommended and actions accordingly.



Managing the recovery phase of a pandemic

Recovery will be assessed and planned to normalise work activities as the pandemic subsides. The local risk control measures will be progressively suspended on a schedule compatible with the suspension of the broader public health measures.

Communication will be driven via TEAMS, and our Morning Mailer with employees both in the workplace and those at home waiting to recommence normal work arrangements.

Employees who are affected by the death of friends or family will receive the required support and leave. At work, counselling should it be needed will be made available where work colleagues have died.

For some time after the pandemic, the normalising process will likely involve re-tasking employees to priority areas. Skills, training needs and workloads will be adjusted and continued through cloud training and consultation with staff will be done before employees are moved to new work.



Summary

A pandemic will be accompanied by considerable social disruption within the community and by major workplace changes.

Potential for infection at work and changed workplace arrangements will present health and safety risks. GTconsult understands its duty of care to actively identify these risks and be prepared to implement control measures to eliminate or minimise them.

The onset of a pandemic may happen quickly, as such GTconsult has develop their business continuity plan, addressing the anticipated business risks of a pandemic and ensure it addresses OHS issues. GTconsult will strive to keep up to date with pandemic advice and regularly review their business continuity plans in line with updated and new information.

Appendix A – Employee Guidelines – Hygiene and Cleansing Measures

Regular and effective hand hygiene

Frequent hand hygiene is one of the most useful ways to prevent infection. Hand hygiene is particularly important after coughing or sneezing, after going to the toilet, after contact with other people and before eating.

Hand hygiene can be either washing your hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

An effective hand washing technique involves using soap and water, scrubbing all parts of the hand and wrist including nails and between fingers for at least 20 seconds, rinsing and then drying with paper towel or a hand dryer.

Alcohol-based hand sanitisers can be used when hands are not visibly dirty. If hands are visibly dirty, they should be washed with soap and water. Hand sanitisers come in the form of gels, foams or rubs and do not require running water or towels. These products usually have a three-year shelf life and should not be exposed to heat or direct sunlight.

Coughing and sneezing etiquette

When coughing or sneezing, the nose and mouth should be covered with a disposable tissue or the upper arm or elbow. Tissues must be used only once and then disposed of into a bin. Hands should be washed (or use a hand sanitiser) after coughing or sneezing or touching used tissues.

In case of a pandemic tissues will be provided and use of the 'hands free' bins as waste receptacle is suggested.

Personal protective equipment

Should employees feel safer with personal protective gear they are free to wear a disposable mask.

Masks should be removed and disposed of safely when they become moist or after coughing and sneezing. So as not to spread infection, it is important masks are correctly applied, not touched or handled when worn, and are correctly disposed of. Other masks that are designed to filter airborne particles may be recommended for people who have a greater risk of exposure to the disease such as healthcare and quarantine workers.

Additional workplace cleaning

GTconsult will with the building managers suggest the implementation of additional regular cleaning for frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, and the cleaning and disinfection of workstations of employees who become ill at work. Areas where there is public access will also be discussed in terms of frequent additional cleaning and disinfection.

Cleaning of environmental surfaces with a neutral detergent followed by a disinfectant solution is recommended. Follow the instructions of the products re dilution and use.

Alcohol wipes could be provided for use on small surfaces, such as telephones.