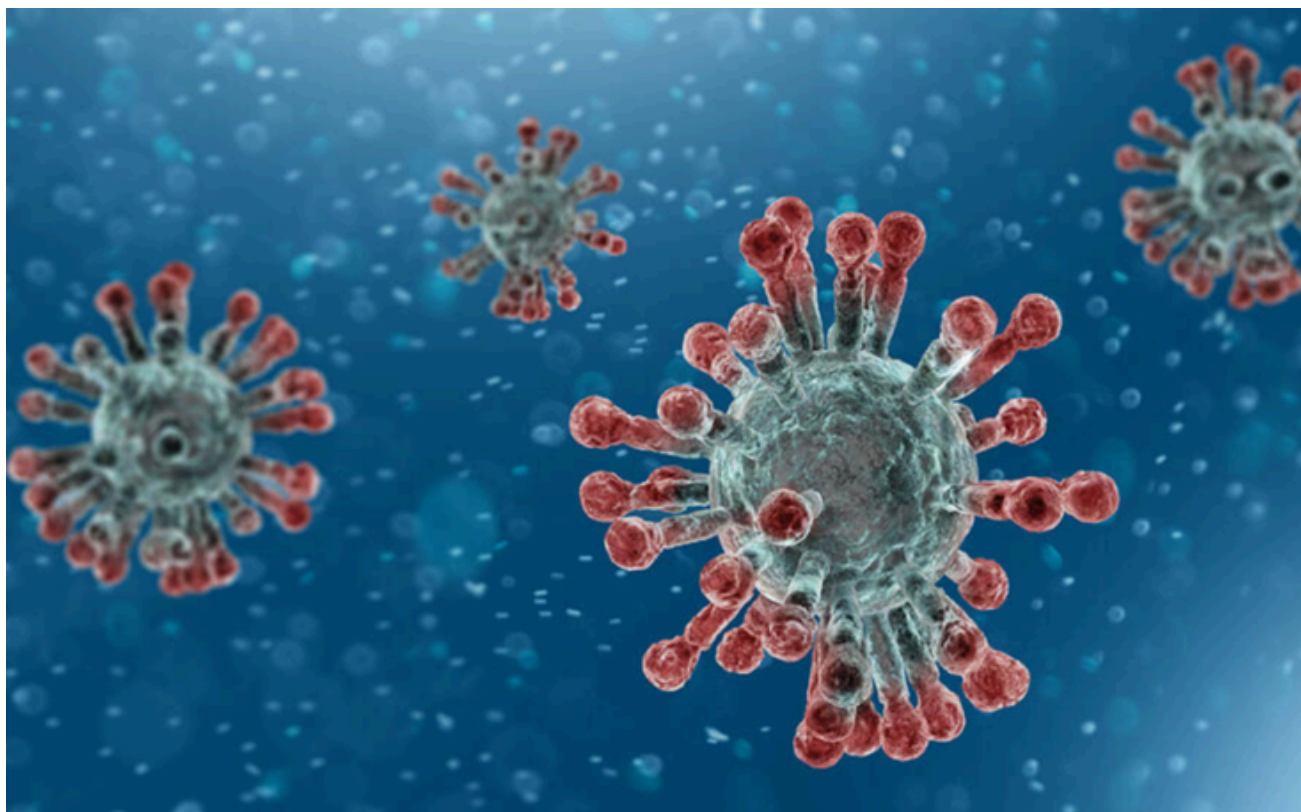


Coronavirus Highlights Need for Businesses to Plan for Health Risks

Joseph Tomaino (March 06, 2020)



Just like the medical field must rely on old-fashioned disease containment until they have the medical know-how to fight each new illness, businesses need to rely on basic emergency preparedness practices to protect themselves.

The Coronavirus epidemic has captured much media attention in recent weeks, and many of my colleagues have asked me whether it is being overblown. The answer is no – it is a serious problem. The main issue is that the Coronavirus is a contagious disease caused by a virus that has the capacity to quickly make the leap from “animal to human” transmission. The other issue is that there is no cure or vaccination yet developed to prevent widespread infection. The only thing that can be done for patients is supportive care to help the body's own immune system fight the infection. It is also frightening that, unlike the typical flu, which most severely impacts the very young and the very old, this virus can kill the average healthy adult as well.

From an epidemiologic point of view, the answer is containment and the prevention of spread. This is done by removing the sources of the infection, such as cleaning up the meat markets where the initial outbreak and others like it occurred and placing into quarantine the individuals who are



infected or who have been exposed. Travel restrictions also help reduce the opportunity for spreading the infection. Efforts are underway to quickly develop a vaccine, but even at its fastest pace, that will take months. In the meantime, basic principles of infection control and supportive care of those infected are all anyone can do.

From a business perspective, the impact is also great. Many factories in China were kept offline for an extended New Year celebration to decrease the chance of virus spread, and many remain closed today. Any manufacturer throughout the world who relies on the production of a component of their product from China is likely to feel the impact of this stoppage. Additionally, the ships that would normally take these products to their ultimate destination are left in port without their full loads. This is creating a logistical backup as products that would be shipped on next legs of their voyage are still sitting in the ports.

While the delivery of products along the supply chain is largely out of a business owner's control, there are other steps a business can take to mitigate the risks and impact of a possible Coronavirus outbreak or any other epidemic that may hit the United States.

Plan for International Health Risks

The overall risk assessments and safeguards that businesses employ should take into account regional health risks throughout the world. The business can mitigate these risks through diversification of supply chain and better logistical planning. Automation of production is increasingly reducing the value proposition of production in low-wage countries. As automation creates more opportunity for goods to be cost-effectively produced closer to the point of consumption, businesses will have more options to diversify and decrease the risks described above. Take the time to assess your business risks for regional health interruptions or logistics backlog and develop a mitigation plan that clearly addresses them.

Update Business Response Strategies

Many business response plans and insurance policies do not cover business interruption, employee management and other issues caused by an epidemic. It may not seem a likely scenario in this age of advanced healthcare, but as the Coronavirus proves, we are still susceptible to breakdowns in hygiene and basic infection control. We continue to face new organisms that evolve and mutate while we have no understanding, treatment or vaccination.

Just like the medical field must rely on old-fashioned disease containment until they have the medical know-how to fight each new illness, businesses need to rely on basic emergency preparedness practices to protect themselves.

Revisit your business response plan and update it to provide your employees with procedures for dealing with infected employees or their infected family members, implementing work-at-home policies if an outbreak occurs, covering the cost of professionally disinfecting the office and other decisions they will need to make to minimize business interruption.

If an epidemic ever affects your business, your highest priority will be to protect your employees from exposure. Effectively implementing mitigation strategies will not only minimize the chance of spreading the virus but also protect the financial health and viability of everyone's workplace.

For more information on developing risk mitigation and business continuity plans, please contact Joseph Tomaino, MS, RN, CEO of [Grassi Healthcare Advisors](http://GrassiHealthcareAdvisors.com) [2], at jtomaino@grassihealthcareadvisors.com [3] or 212.223.5020.q

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