



## Is Your Business Ready for the Pandemic?

H1N1 is not just a medical or public health challenge - it's a business issue that affects everything from operations to employee absence. Though pandemic preparedness has been an important part of Canadian business continuity planning since SARS in 2003, many companies were unprepared for the recent H1N1 outbreak.

The World Health Organization advises that pandemic outbreaks occur typically in three waves, each with increasing strength. Although it seems like the worst is now behind us, Canadian researchers are predicting an all out influenza pandemic this fall. "We don't know what is coming in the fall and we don't know how to address it. We need to collaborate so we have a clear understanding of what needs to be done and our priorities need to be focused on transmission and prevention," said Dr. Earl Brown, a pandemic researcher from the University of Ottawa.

All businesses, hospitals and government agencies will feel the effects of a pandemic, with 15 to 35 percent of workforce expected to be ill. "We are still in the first pandemic outbreak wave and many Canadian companies are still not adequately prepared. As our hands are responsible for the spread of 80% of common infectious diseases, effective hand hygiene continues to be universally recognized as the smartest, most cost effective means of infection control," says Tom Bannon, a skin safety and hand hygiene expert with Deb Canada.

Although frequent handwashing with soap and water is still the preferred hand hygiene practice, alcohol-based hand sanitizers are recommended as an alternative to hand-washing when water is not available.

"Placing alcohol-based hand sanitizers at the entrance of facilities or in high-traffic areas of the office is very effective in preventing transmission. When it comes to common germs found in the workplace, Instant-FOAM kills 99.999% in just 15 seconds. As well, preliminary in vitro third party testing on Deb's Instant-FOAM Alcohol Hand Sanitizer has shown effectiveness against H1N1," adds Bannon.



A flu pandemic could cost the Canadian economy billions of dollars in lost productivity and medical expenses. The Government of Canada has estimated that the economic impact (direct and indirect) on the healthcare system alone would be 10 to 24 billion dollars. "The pandemic threat is more of a marathon than a sprint, so you need to be prepared accordingly. With the expectation of a second wave this fall, businesses still have time to develop a pandemic plan and ensure they have enough hand hygiene products and educational materials in stock. Being prepared is the best way to ensure business as usual," concludes Bannon.

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