



# **Pandemic Plan for the Church**

## *Ministering to the Community in a Time of Crisis*

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### **Church and Community Pandemic Mitigation Strategies**

The collaboration of community leaders, especially those in churches and faith-based organizations with public health agencies will be essential in protecting the public's health and safety if and when an influenza pandemic occurs.

This section presents some templates and guidelines for developing pandemic mitigation plans and improving influenza pandemic response. Developing and initiating guidelines such as these during a pandemic will help protect people from exposure to disease, decrease the spread of disease, and will aid the Church in the continuation of ministry to its members. Many of these guidelines will help improve your organization's ability to protect your community during emergencies in general. Many experts agree that if you are prepared for an influenza pandemic such as the 1918 Spanish Influenza, then you are prepared for most any disaster.

The contents of this section are based on information from the Centers for Disease Control ([www.flu.gov/professional/community/faithcomchecklist.html](http://www.flu.gov/professional/community/faithcomchecklist.html)), World Health Organization ([www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.htm](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.htm)), and the "Buncombe County Health Department Vulnerable Populations Initiative" ([www.buncombecounty.org/living/safety/Disaster\\_VPI.htm](http://www.buncombecounty.org/living/safety/Disaster_VPI.htm)). This document is not affiliated with any of these organizations and only borrows from their expertise. The writing and distribution of this document is not sanctioned nor authorized by any government entity. The goal is to aid leaders in the Church to prepare for such an event as a pandemic and to enable them to continue their ministry to the Body of Christ.

The declaration of a pandemic by the Centers of Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), will greatly affect the normal practices of the Church. Services or meetings may be prohibited as part of the government's intent to mitigate the spread of disease. If the flu is causing more severe illness, CDC and local health departments may suggest that people avoid close contact with others and prohibit large gatherings – a practice called social distancing. These measures are intended to slow the spread of flu. For more information, please refer to the section on "Social Distancing" in the chapter "Government Mitigations Plans for the Community".

### **Disseminating Information**

As leaders in your church and community you are uniquely positioned to share information with the members of your church and even your local community. If a radio or television outreach is part of your ministry, the scope of your message is even broader. Sharing accurate and timely facts in the event of a pandemic or other crisis would be a lifesaving service to your community. Disseminating correct and timely information will enable people to prepare and respond appropriately. Beginning to incorporate some of these tactics today can

create “information feeds” that can aid and minister to people if such an event occurs or when gatherings are prohibited.

In the section of “Initiating a Plan”, it was mentioned becoming familiar with information sources such as CDC, WHO, or your local health department, etc. to garner current news and facts relating to circulating viruses. Such knowledge would be essential to confirm the accuracy of information and not promote unnecessary fear. Below are some ways to distribute information, these strategies can be incorporated for seasonal flu as well as a pandemic:

- Consider a church newsletter that contains health and safety tips or a flu facts section that keeps the congregation updated on the latest information.
- Distribute fact sheets, posters, letters, and other information encouraging preparation.
- Consider designating time in a sermon or announcements to prevent and treat the flu.
- Each week during announcements include a safety tip.
- Set up a phone tree to ensure all members are notified.
- Create an e-mail list.
- Post information updates on your website or add links to other informational websites.
- Include a section for “Healthy Habits” or “Flu Facts” in your newsletter, bulletin, and web site.
- Consider a newsletter designated for preparation for a pandemic or any disaster. In this newsletter, include tips on how to share the gospel during such an event.
- Develop a way to ensure all members, especially those who are vulnerable and hard-to-reach, receive information and stay connected. For more information on this, please see the section on “Pre-Identifying Vulnerable People”.
- Place pre-record messages on a designated call-in phone number.
- Post notices in frequently accessed places.
- Designate a bulletin board just for flu facts and updates, include ways of obtaining more information.
- Obtain or download and print posters to encourage proper hygiene. These can be found at [www.cdc.gov/germstopper/materials.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper/materials.htm).
- If your church has home fellowship meetings, instruct the leaders of these groups to encourage preparation. Be sure to keep them updated with current information as well.

- **Assist people with physical, sensory, intellectual, or communication disabilities** by using alternative communication strategies. For example, provide links to CDC Resources for the deaf and hard of hearing at [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/deaf.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/deaf.htm).
- If during a pandemic, you are unable to contact your members, consider placing an ad in the local newspaper, or news website.
- Sponsor a weekend conference and invite special speakers from your health department or local hospital to address your members.

## Encourage Good Health Habits

The time to practice health hygiene and create good habits is now. If a pandemic were to occur, it will already be too late incorporate new habits into your lifestyle. Influenza and corona viruses prove to be contagious even before a person shows symptoms of the disease. Ways to encourage good health habits include the following:

- If available, encourage people to get vaccinated.
- Contact your local health department for flu vaccine clinics. Some may offer free vaccines to specific segments of the public.
- Consider offering your facilities as a site for the health department to set up a vaccine clinic.
- Educate and encourage people to cover their mouths and noses with a tissue when they cough or sneeze, and to throw the tissue away after use. If they don't have a tissue, they should cough or sneeze into their elbows or shoulder, not into their hands. Display reminder posters. As mentioned, these posters can be obtained from CDC.
- Have readily available tissues and waste receptacles handy during flu season, include alcohol-based hand rubs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- Remind everyone to wash their hands regularly and provide the proper supplies for them to do so. Hands should be washed often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. If soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand rub can be used.
- Encourage staff to stay home and parents/caregivers to keep a sick child at home when they have flu-like symptoms. Encourage your congregants to do the same. Flu symptoms may include:
  - Fever
  - Cough
  - Sore throat
  - Runny or stuffy nose

- Body aches
  - Headache
  - Chills
  - Tiredness
  - Sometimes vomiting and diarrhea
- Send sick staff home immediately. Tell them to not return until at least twenty-four hours after they no longer have signs or symptoms of a fever (chills, feeling very warm, flushed appearance, or sweating), without the use of a medicine to reduce the fever such as acetaminophen, aspirin, or ibuprofen.
  - Routinely clean surfaces and items that are frequently touched by different people, such as doorknobs, faucets, and telephones. Wipe these surfaces with a household disinfectant, following the directions on the product label. A weak 1:100 bleach solution will also work. For more information, please see the section titled “Disinfecting Surfaces”.
  - Encourage the people of your church who have higher risks for complications from flu to consult their healthcare provider if they become sick with flu-like symptoms. Pregnant women, children under five years of age, and people with certain chronic health conditions (such as asthma, heart disease, or diabetes) are at higher risk for flu complications and may benefit from early treatment with antiviral medicines.
  - Try to avoid close contact with sick people. If you are caring for the sick, then wear proper protection such as a face mask.
  - Instruct those who take medications regularly to check and refill supplies of prescription and over-the-counter drugs periodically to ensure they have an adequate supply.
  - Encourage people to maintain a two-week supply of food and other necessities to avoid the need to shop while sick or if local businesses are closed due to illness being widespread in your community.
  - See <http://www.flu.gov/individualfamily/checklist.html> for a checklist with more information.

## **Adjusting Activities to Protect Your Community**

If there is an influenza virus circulating that is severe or pandemic; however, the local authorities still allow public gatherings, you may consider the following to protect the people in your community from the spread of disease:

- Consider adding a worship service to reduce crowding.
- Identify activities that may increase the spread of the flu and consider limiting these activities.
- Encourage people with flu-like symptoms to remain home.

- Consider temporarily closing children's programs if flu is widespread in the community.
- Many services and community meetings involve a time of greeting or recognition by shaking hands or hugging. Encourage communication without physical contact and instruct people to maintain a few feet of distance from each other.
- Some religious traditions and rituals emphasize eating and drinking from communal dishes and vessels. Flu may spread in these conditions. You may consider adjusting these practices.

## **Encourage Personal Preparedness**

The motive of writing the book, *Pandemic Flu Plan for the Church*, was that when a pandemic or other disaster were to occur, the Body of Christ would be found ready and not fall victim. That we would be able to minister to others not only in word only, but in tangible ways in caring for the sick and needy. In order to be able to perform these acts of love, we must be prepared not only as a Body but individually as well.

The Word of God encourages us to be wise and be prepared; to walk circumspectly:

*“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”* Ephesians 5:15-17

Consider a newsletter or insert to the weekly bulletin with a letter stating the importance of preparation. You may want to include a list of food and supplies that should be stocked. When encouraging others to personally prepare, have them keep in mind that they may want to store enough to share with their neighbors.

## **Stocking Food and Supplies**

During a pandemic, normal daily activities will be disrupted. All segments of the population will be affected as will all facets of society. Stores may close due to absenteeism or the lack of supplies. Gas stations will be closed due to lack of fuel. The transportation of goods may be suspended, and supply chains interrupted. Doctor's offices and hospitals will be overwhelmed with patients. Power, water, garbage collection, emergency services, in addition to many other services, may be interrupted, delayed, or non-existent. WHO and CDC recommend that you should have at least a two-week supply of water and food set aside. This should be considered as a bare minimum. It is predicted that waves of a pandemic may last up to twelve weeks.

Examples of food types to store:

- Nonperishable foods such as:
  - Ready to eat canned:
    - Meats

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- Fish
- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Beans
- Soups
- Pasta
- Protein or fruit bars
- Dry cereal or granola
- Peanut butter or nuts
- Dried fruits
- Crackers
- Canned juices
- Bottled water (for drinking and cleaning)
- Baby food and formula
- Pet food

Examples of medical, health and emergency supplies:

- Thermometer
- Medicines for fever such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, and aspirin
- Fluids with electrolytes
- Anti-diarrheal medication
- Anti-emetic medication
- Soap and water or alcohol based (60-90%) hand wash
- Vitamins
- Soap
- Manual can opener
- Tissues, toilet paper, and disposable diapers
- Garbage bags
- Flashlight with batteries
- Portable radio with batteries
- Candles
- Alcohol based hand sanitizer
- Medical gloves

- Facemasks

Those who take prescription medications should talk to their doctor about having an available refill in the event of a disaster. Watch all your medications and ensure they do not run out. Arrange to have a refill available at the pharmacy or keep an extra refill already in the house.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive, simply as a guide. These lists are representative of your needs if during an emergency you were to shelter at home. Other lists for disaster preparedness that include goods if you are forced to leave your home can be found on the internet at [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).

## **Start a Food Pantry for Emergencies**

Your church may want to start a food pantry. If your church already has a pantry you may want to increase its stock and broaden the inventory in preparation for a disaster for the sake of additional needs.

Depending on your goals, it can be as big or as small as your needs require. Before taking on such a project, there are some factors to be considered:

- Assign a person to lead the project
- A large enough space with shelving will be required; preferably a room with a door and a lock to ensure security
- The room must be kept at a regular temperature not subject to extreme heat or cold (i.e., a garage)
- The environment should have low humidity
- Ensure the food is rotated regularly. Put older stock to the front, and remove expired stock
- Know the signs of compromised foods, especially signs of botulism
- Determine in advance the criteria individuals must meet to qualify for food to be disbursed
- You may want to keep records for the families that receive food
- Consider collecting and distributing foods for special dietary needs
- Determine in advance if this pantry will be available for your church members only or others in the community

You might find that there are individuals attending your congregation that fall under the vulnerable population category. These people may need special supplies that are not normally collected in a food bank. Consider naming this special storage a “Necessities Bank.” Some of these items may include:

- Glucometer and strips
- Over the counter medications

- Antihistamines
- Aspirin
- Ibuprofen
- Acetaminophen
- Diarrhea and Nausea (i.e., Kaopectate, Pepto-Bismol, Immodium)
- Adult diapers
- Hearing aid batteries
- Blankets/clothing for homeless
- Face masks
- Gloves

Start a food drive to begin to collect food/supplies for your pantry. Following the list for personal preparedness will guide you in what goods to collect. Some ideas to promote your food drive are:

- Display posters in high traffic areas
- Send e-mail messages
- Advertise in your bulletin, or announcements
- Distribute food/supply collection bags
- Have containers for collection placed at the entrance of the church
- Challenge different ministry teams to contests for the most amount of food/supplies collected
- Give prizes or sponsor a party for the team that collects the most food/supplies
- Invite other churches in your community to participate
- When hosting ministry events, make the admission price a bag of food or supplies
- Offer to pick up items from members if they are unable to bring them
- Host a food drive party
- Announce each week an item to be brought the following week (i.e., peanut butter)
- Engage the youth ministry to help with collection. Allow for creative ways through the youth to promote collection.

## **Guidelines for Churches that Support Homeless and Emergency Shelters**

**For those churches that support homeless and emergency shelters, it is important that you protect the health of your staff, volunteers, and those you serve. CDC has released specific guidance for homeless and emergency shelters, available at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/homeless.htm>. Some recommendations include:**

- Minimizing contact between sick people and healthy people



- Providing hand sanitizers and access to hand-washing facilities; and
- Staying informed about current guidance from CDC and your state or local health department.

Please be sure to have a Tuberculosis (TB) test administered every year for all of your staff and volunteers who work with the homeless. Unfortunately, TB cases have increased in the U.S., with new resistant strains to antibiotics. Signs and symptoms of TB include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Chronic cough with phlegm or blood

## **Prepare for Days When Gatherings Are Prohibited**

Social distancing will be considered during a Pandemic Severity Index of 2 or higher. Please see the “Community Mitigation Plans” section or visit the CDC website for further information. Within the community, the goals of these interventions are to reduce community transmission pressures and thus slow or limit transmission. As stated earlier, cancellation or postponement of large gatherings will be enforced.

A large public gathering refers to an assembly or grouping of many people in one place. Such gatherings can include college and university commencement exercises, church services, sporting events, concerts, social and cultural celebrations, weddings, conferences, and other similar activities attended by relatively large groups of people. The intervention by local governments to prohibit such gatherings may not define the gatherings but rather, the focus will be on community situations in which crowding is likely to occur. In addition, these recommendations do not distinguish between public gatherings held indoors and those held outdoors, because differences in flu transmission patterns in these two settings are not known.

As we know, the conventional way to minister to the Body of Christ is weekly gathering; the Church should be prepared to be able to serve in unconventional ways. Some of these ways to reach parishioners may be to:

- Video messages on the internet
- E-mail message
- Mail newsletters
- Pre-record messages on a designated call-in phone
- Mail out daily teaching guides
- Write weekly letters like our founding Church leaders, Paul, Peter, and John

Arranging for deacons, elders, and other trusted leaders to contact or even visit congregants would also ensure that the members are properly being cared for. This would be an effective way to ensure the spiritual and physical health of the individuals is maintained. For more information, please see the chapters titled, “Pre-Identifying Vulnerable People”, and “Treatise for the Cell Church Model in End Days.”

If you determine that visiting the sick in their homes to be a part of your ministry as such a time, please be sure to have all those participating take proper precautions. Please see the chapters titled “Caring for the Sick”, and “Infection Control”. Also keep in mind that the government may enforce quarantines that would prohibit such visitations to individual’s homes, or possibly neighborhoods.

You may contact other churches in your geographic area and network with them to share resources or even to offer “foster care” of their flock members who live closer to your locality and ask they do likewise for yours. Imagine how crossing denominational lines would please our Lord.

It is essential that the ministry of the Church continues even through a disaster event. It will be during such times that the flock will need caring the most. In addition, there will be those who will turn to the Church looking for hope as well as answers. Now is the time to train and equip church members and leaders how to share their faith, and to give answers for where they find their hope.

Having already established home fellowship groups at this time would be of great significance in continuing the ministry of the Church. Please refer to the section on “Treatise for a Cell Church Model in End Days” for more information.