



Health Alerts

On Wednesday 29th April 2009, the Department of Health and Ageing increased the Australian Pandemic Threat Level from 3 to 4 in response to the spread of H1N1 Influenza 09 (or "Swine Flu" as it has more commonly been referred).

Whilst the perceived seriousness of the threat from "Swine Flu" has reduced markedly from original projections, it has been a timely reminder for building owners, managers and occupants to re-visit their building management strategies for dealing with health emergencies and ensure these strategies are adequate to respond to a range of health emergency scenarios.

The following is an overview of the range of activities which should be covered in a strategy for responding to a health emergency.

The role of the Building Manager and Owner in a health emergency

The Building Manager and Owner should maintain awareness of the potential threat and actively monitor relevant information sources, such as www.healthemergency.gov.au. The Building Manager should also provide regular updates on the threat and inform building occupants of the responsive actions being taken within the building, such as:

Business Continuity Plan

- Conducting an immediate review of the BCP and carrying out all necessary measures.
- Updating the BCP as is deemed necessary in the face of the circumstances.

Cleaning Regimes and Supplies:

- Rigorous cleaning regimes within public areas, particularly to commonly contacted surfaces, such as door handles and lift controls;
- All staff with public contact being trained in hygiene etiquette and social distancing;
- Replacing all hand soap supplies to "Hospital Disinfectant Grade" and ensuring there is a good supply kept in stock
- Providing all visitors to the building with hand sanitization.
- Reviewing all cleaning chemicals with contractors to ensure they disinfect
- Placing additional orders of toilet supplies

HVAC Systems:

- Increasing ventilation by increasing air flow, dampers to be manually driven thus reducing the possibility of re-circulating any virus throughout the building;
- Increasing HVAC preventative maintenance cycles to ensure filters are cleaned and the system is functioning properly;

Contractors and Supply Chain:

- Engaging with contractors and service providers to ensure they have contingency plans in place and the human and material resources to continue to provide services

Communications:

- Establishing a communication platform to allow for emergency lock-down and notification of building occupants if directed by health authorities;
- Reducing the probability of conflicting information by establishing a common point of contact for questions and/or concerns;
- Considering the closure of non-essential common areas;
- Providing signage throughout the building, warning of health risk and reminding occupants of their responsibilities
- Educating occupants about the means by which the health risk is spread.

Other measures may include limiting or prohibiting visitor admittance to the building by increasing access control and restricting non-essential deliveries to the building.

The role of the Building Occupant in a health emergency

For their part, occupants also play an important role in reducing the impact of a health emergency, such as the spread of influenza through the following measures:

- Being aware of the relevant symptoms – such as fatigue, cough, fever, headache, sore throat, body aches and chills.
- Employers asking employees who feel ill to seek medical advice and to stay at, or work from, home;
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick;
- Covering the mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing to prevent spreading the virus;
- Frequently washing hands with soap or alcohol-based cleaner;

For further information please contact:

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