

Coronavirus: Moving to Disease Management

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The Coronavirus (specifically the COVID-19 strain) situation is changing constantly with an acceleration in cases and more restrictive measures being taken by countries across the globe. Organisations have shifted the focus from prevention to ongoing management with a focus on business continuity and supporting employee welfare.

We have outlined some of the emerging best practices as multinationals seek to ensure effective management of what is likely to be a protracted pandemic:



DAILY OVERSIGHT MEETINGS & MONITORING

Organisations are reviewing developments and government directives and their implications for the business and workforce. This is managed through a daily meeting of appropriate stakeholders where corporate policy and regular communications can be developed. Examples of this would include a policy implementing the emerging guidance around social distancing, isolation of high-risk individuals, including pregnant women.



REVIEW BENEFIT PROGRAMS (AVAILABLE SUPPORT, EXCLUSIONS & BUDGETS)

Three key elements to consider related to the existing employee benefit programs are as follows:

- **Leverage the Capabilities of Current Benefit Providers:** A number of providers can offer services to support employees. Examples include, promotion of virtual doctor services and mental health services provided as part of the EAP.
- **Review Policy Exclusions:** Certain employee risk/healthcare policies have exclusions for pandemics or single event limitations and cover restrictions on travel to infected countries. It is important for

organisations to understand any exclusions and their exposure to any uninsured risk.

- **Future Budgetary Considerations:** Organisations are likely to see hardening of benefits insurance markets with potentially significant increases of cost in 2021 as the financial impact of the virus spread materialises. In addition, organisations with employees in self-insured healthcare marketplaces such as the USA should review the factors influencing costs such as federal intervention & reduction in routine (non-emergency) procedures alongside projections of COVID-19 costs.

Organisations should also be mindful that vendors will also be experiencing reduced staffing and stress testing their capabilities can better prepare organisations for the future.



TEST AND DEVELOP THE HR COMPONENTS OF BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANS

Resiliency plans have long been developed but few have modelled the impact of significant proportions of the population being impacted by a pandemic. As the spread of the virus accelerates and its implications on the workforce become clearer, it is crucial to continue to test the contingency plans and review alternative scenarios. As we move into the traditional vacation season planned absence also needs to be factored into the staffing model and resilience planning.



PROACTIVE HR COMMUNICATIONS AND RESOURCES

As anxiety in the workforce grows, there is a greater need for support and access to information. Organisations are increasingly developing specific COVID-19 landing sites for employees which cover the spectrum from prevention to managing the virus. The material and guidance also provide direction (or policy) on issues such as working from home, sick leave, social distancing and a constantly evolving FAQ's document.

Organisations are also highlighting the available resources and support that employees can access from existing benefit providers.



DEVELOP CLEAR SCENARIO PLANS FOR MANAGING INCIDENTS

As the spread of infection within the workforce increases, organisations have developed playbooks with different scenarios, including:

- Infection in a building with multiple occupancy
- Different levels of infection within the workforce
- Multiple infections within the workforce

The playbook covers all actions from employee engagement, to facilities management to business continuity. Plans for facility deep cleaning and notification of employees need to be prepared.



REMOTE WORKING/TELECOMMUTING

For those industries where it is possible, offices are closing and more individuals are being asked to work from home. Where this isn't possible, we have seen the use of shift patterns and splitting teams across physical locations. This change in working habits has led to three needs:

- **Remote Working Policy:** There is a need for employees to have guidance on how they should work remotely, as well as what resources the organization will make available to support them. This type of policy is even more important in geographic regions where home working is not part of the cultural norm.
- **Managing the Societal Implications of Home Working:** We are already seeing the initial signs of how periods of quarantine and home working are impacting on employee wellbeing. Organisations are implementing strategies to maintain social engagement with the employees but also highlighting available resources to support emerging mental health issues.
- **Senior Individuals:** Due to the critical nature to any business of certain senior personnel, a practice of eliminating face to face meetings and rotation of office/facility attendance should reduce cross contamination and allow businesses to continue to operate albeit at a reduced capacity. Business continuation, often hinged on the ability of senior individuals to make decisions and effect strategy, is even more vital during this unstable time.

Should you want to discuss any aspect of this note further, or need any support please contact either:

Simon Ball

Fidelity Workplace Consulting

tel: +44 (0)20 7184 3586

simon.ball@fmr.com

Andrés Sanabria

Fidelity Workplace Consulting

tel: +1 817-474-6408

cell: +1 629-335-1472

andres.sanabria@fmr.com



Authoritative advice on COVID-19, which is regularly updated, is available from the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) - it includes information on the virus, how to protect yourself, FAQ's & myth-busters. This material can be promoted to all employees. Governments are also increasingly providing advice which should also be monitored for implications at a local level.