

THE INSIDE PERSPECTIVE

LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT LAW SOLUTIONS FOR EXECUTIVES AND HR PROFESSIONALS



SMITH MOORE LLP
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Widespread Flu Outbreak - Is Your Workplace Ready?

Following 9/11, many employers implemented disaster response plans that focused on safety and business continuity in the wake of terrorism or a military crisis. Employers in the path of Hurricane Katrina know well the need for advance planning to handle disruptions due to weather. Now comes a third warning for employers who have not considered emergency preparedness: the flu.

Health experts predict that a flu pandemic will hit the United States, although no one can say when. The focus is on the highly infectious avian flu virus, known as H5N1, for which no effective, readily available vaccine currently exists.

What would happen to your workplace if the community is hit with a flu outbreak lasting six to eight weeks? What can you do to prepare?

- On November 14, 2006, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration issued new guidelines for protecting the workplace safety of employees in the event of a pandemic. Those guidelines, found at www.osha.gov, offer tips for preventing employee infection. Other websites on pandemic planning and disaster preparedness offered by the federal government are also useful, such as those found at www.pandemicflu.gov and www.ready.gov.
- Consider whether policies on sick leave, travel, or telecommuting need to be changed to deal with prolonged absences.
- Consider the practicality of temporarily imposing staggered shifts, eliminating group meetings, and instituting heightened workplace sanitation practices.
- Consider unexpected business interruption when negotiating contracts. Evaluate the legal obligations you will face under current contracts in the event your business is interrupted due to an emergency.
- Involve employees from each of the functional areas of your business in the effort to identify how an outbreak could affect work duties and in the development of a comprehensive set of contingency plans.

TIP

Choosing to believe a health emergency will never happen in your community puts your business too much at risk. Planning now will protect the health of both your employees and your business.



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The firm restricts its practice in the labor and employment area to the representation of management.



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