

NMHC Overview: Suggested Apartment Owner Preparations for Pandemic Flu

The following is an outline of key components that apartment owners and managers should consider for inclusion in their company/property pandemic flu plan.

NMHC recognizes the broad array of company types, sizes and geographic locations that discourage one-size-fits-all approach to planning. This “sample outline” is not to be construed as legal guidance but merely a starting point for your company-specific plan. Therefore we encourage you to seek expert consultation in the development of your plan to ensure comprehensive coverage.

More detailed information on preparing for a pandemic flu is available via NMHC's White Paper, [Pandemic Flu: Apartment Owner Preparations](#).

Firms are also encouraged to join [NMHC's Emergency Preparedness Listserve](#). NMHC will use this e-mail exchange group to notify members of new developments and new resources of value to apartment operators. It is also a discussion forum for member firms to discuss their preparedness planning and developments in their markets.

CORE ELEMENTS OF A PLAN

- 1. PLAN**
- 2. PREPARE**
- 3. RESPOND**
- 4. RECOVER**

PLAN

Create a crisis team and appoint senior-level staff from the following areas:

- Corporate Suite
- Risk Management
- Human Resources
- Legal
- IT
- Operations

Team members must:

- Be educated about the threat, i.e. be able to locate and understand all available/reliable resources.
- Have decision-making authority.
- Be able to dedicate financial resources to the effort.



- Understand the role of federal, state, and local government; i.e., review state plans and establish relationships.
- Assess implications of pandemic to community operations, i.e., building operations, safety of employees and residents, continued revenue streams, disruption in services.
- Seek expert advice on plan development.

PREPARE

Considerations must be given to the following company operation areas:

- A. COMMUNICATIONS**
- B. OPERATIONS-SUPPLIES-INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**
- C. HUMAN RESOURCES**
- D. RISK MANAGEMENT-LEGAL**

COMMUNICATIONS

Operational Points:

- Appoint spokesperson(s) for corporate office and apartment communities. Anticipate situations that may involve media inquiries, underscoring the need to prepare a company message.
- Maintain current contact lists: phone numbers (land and cell), e-mail for all residents and employees, suppliers, contractors, etc.
- Develop alternative platform for communications with residents and employees to disseminate critical information in the event of telecommunications disruptions, i.e., Website, hotlines, etc.

Who-What-Where-When ...of Communications

Who: Identify recipients of communications, i.e., employees, residents, contractors, suppliers, public.

What: Determine the type and content of messages that will be communicated.

Where: Corporate office vs. resident community.

When: Identify trigger points for dissemination, i.e. World Health Organization (WHO) six-phase Pandemic Alert System, or upon confirmation of first resident or employee illness.

Examples of communications to employees and residents:

- Educational information about pandemic prevention practices, i.e., hand washing.
- Changes in office policies, i.e. telecommuting policy, sick policy, etc.
- Changes in resident policies, i.e. prohibition against propane tanks and the running of generators in units, transition to an emergency-only maintenance policy.

OPERATIONS-SUPPLIES-INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The following elements should be considered in your plan:

INFECTION CONTROL

- Hand washing, encouraging cough etiquette, isolation, sanitizing work areas and public places, establish cleaning standards on commonly touched elements, e.g., door handles, elevator buttons, etc.

- Communicate basic hygiene information to residents and employees.

IDENTIFICATION OF CRITICAL FUNCTIONS

Determine which services and functions to continue, discontinue or change

- Leasing office activities: Determine when and if to transition to on-line leasing.
- Rent Collection: Establish online payment, drop-off boxes and other alternatives to in-person payment.
- Miscellaneous: Service calls, trash collection, security needs, cleaning and maintenance.
- The closure of community areas, i.e. fitness center, pool, game room, cyber café, etc.
- Move-in/move-out (anticipate temporary moratorium).

STOCKPILE SUPPLIES

- Warehouse cleaning supplies, batteries, flashlights, personal protective equipment, i.e. latex gloves, N95 masks, antibacterial solutions.
- Institute policy on distributions and use, anticipate security issues.
- Establish cleaning standards.

SUPPLY/SERVICE DISRUPTION

- Trash removal: Contract for services ahead of time, seek alternative contractors
- Power Outages: Secure alternative source, i.e. generators
- Transportation Shutdown: Know the implications for essential on-site staff, consider use of model units
- Information Technology: Plan backup systems and schedule use to minimize drain on system. Anticipate Internet failure; backup records and files
- Understand emergency prep plans of banks and other business partners

HUMAN RESOURCES

SOCIAL DISTANCING

- Develop a leave policy that include telecommuting, staggered schedules, liberal leave
- Cross-train employees in anticipation of long-term absences of some staffers
- Test telecommuting plans

RISK MANAGEMENT-LEGAL

Pandemic Flu raises a host of legal issues that should be analyzed in advance to reduce company liability

- Consider sources of liability: resident illness and deaths, employee exposure to sick residents or colleagues, crime on property, evictions, employee leave scenarios.
- Determine how much risk to assume on behalf of residents, i.e., direct residents to information sources vs. being the source of information; distribute protective supplies vs. advising residents to secure themselves.

RESPOND

Trigger Events:

- Identify when to institute various planning elements as identified above. (If using the WHO's 6-phase pandemic alert system, it is anticipated businesses would implement at Phase 4 of the 6-phase system)
- Maintain flexibility to adjust to unanticipated events

RECOVERY

- Determine human and financial impact on company and property operations
- Assess available government support, i.e. FEMA, Red Cross
- Develop Communication strategies for:
 - Employees
 - Residents
 - Investors/partners
 - Suppliers
 - Media
- Insurance Evaluation: Document property damage
- Human Resources: Develop a return-to-work policy
- Employee Assistance programs/counseling
- Evaluate re-opening of common areas and services
- Evaluate effectiveness of plan and modify as needed