

RISK Alert

ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR BOND POLICYHOLDERS.



Alert Type

Awareness

Watch

Warning

Increased Coronavirus Infections Leads to Preparing Pandemic Response Plans

While credit unions should continue to take a commonsense approach to prevent the spread of any communicable disease, like issuing employee travel restrictions to high risk areas, promoting good workplace hygiene, and encouraging sick employees to stay home, this may not be enough to prevent an impact in the workplace. Focus should be placed on developing and prioritizing pandemic preparedness plans, consistent communications, and continuity of business operations.

Details

Increased headlines and social media posts about growing coronavirus (COVID-19) infections have many credit unions concerned about their ability to continue critical operations while ensuring employee safety. Credit union leadership should remain committed to emergency preparedness and business continuity planning. A pandemic crisis can create confusion and potential panic among employees and even leadership.

Open communication and coordination with employees, critical service providers, and suppliers is an important aspect of pandemic planning. While standard business continuity plans often include provisions for vendor services, these service providers will likely suffer similar levels of absenteeism and reduced levels of operations during a pandemic. Given the criticality of vendor relationships, credit unions may want to review and assess vendors' pandemic plans to see that they are documented and tested to the same level as those of your own organization.

Additionally, state and local community pandemic preparation and response initiatives such as school closings may strongly affect employee's availability. Monitor state and local policies to understand how they may affect employees during a crisis. High absenteeism in schools as well as utility providers (e.g. electricity, telephone, and internet service) may create impacts across access networks and degrade service levels well below normal.

If there is a reasonable belief that an employee may have been exposed to the coronavirus and is a risk to the workplace, the credit union may consider requiring the employee to work from home. When making this determination, consider factors such as any recent employee travel, the areas and airports visited, the amount of time the employee has been back, and any symptoms of an illness. If an employee's position does not allow him or her to work from home, then consideration may be given to providing the employee with paid leave for the duration of the incubation period.

Date: March 10, 2020

Risk Category: Employee Safety, Workplace Safety, Employment Practices; Business Continuity Pandemics

States: All

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Risk Mitigation Tips

- Credit unions who reasonably believe they could serve members or have employees who could potentially travel to and from an infected region should be prepared to provide reassurance and education.
- Remind employees of general good workplace hygiene practices such as covering one's mouth when coughing or sneezing, avoiding contact with sick individuals, and washing hands frequently. Consideration should be given to providing tissues and hand sanitizer throughout credit union locations. Waste bins should be emptied frequently and surfaces properly disinfected.
- Encourage employees to review company sick leave and paid time-off policies and encourage employees to stay home if they are feeling ill. Remote work arrangements should be utilized if previously agreed upon. A point of contact should be identified to answer any employee questions related sick leave use, or the accrual process.
- A credit union's business continuity plan or pandemic response plan should be tested for viability. Practice scenarios will reveal deficiencies in need of correction and improvement. Tabletop tests, or rehearsals will help ensure critical staff members are proficient in the execution of their responsibilities during a pandemic.
- Many States have the authority during pandemics to address this issue through health codes, and law enforcement. Credit unions should understand how these local and state laws might affect the ability of employees to come to work. Consideration should be given to participating in regional partnerships. Regional partnerships with other financial institutions, community organizations, and businesses can offer opportunities to work together to enhance information sharing, and to improve coordination in the event of a crisis, including a pandemic. Such partnerships also create opportunities for coordination with local, State, and Federal government agencies.
- Telecommuting plans should be tested for effectiveness. Pandemic situations may affect telecommunications and internet congestion which could severely diminish employee productivity. If you are considering asking employees to use personal mobile and desktop devices for telecommuting purposes, information security departments should identify minimum standards of security for these devices to access credit union networks. This type of policy may lead to accusations of disparate treatment and advanced steps should be taken to avoid these claims.
- Human resource departments should be prepared to deal with "sick shaming" or other requests to avoid employees who may have been exposed. Employees should be reminded to not excluded co-workers from activities based on country of origin or recent travel if they do not have symptoms of respiratory illness.
- In the event of school closings, credit unions should evaluate their policies for allowing children in the workplace. These situations may pose additional risk for infection to employees and the child.

Risk Prevention Resources

Access CUNA Mutual Group's [Protection Resource Center](#) at cunamutual.com for exclusive risk resources to assist with your loss control. The Protection Resource Center requires a User ID and password.

Review these resources from The Hartford, our Workers' Compensation partner:

- [What You Should Know About The Coronavirus](#)
- [Business Continuity Planning for an Infectious Disease Event](#)

For ongoing Coronavirus updates, check out these resource links:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [U.S. Department of State](#)
- [Occupational Safety & Health Administration Pandemic Preparedness](#)

The employment practices risk management hub, www.epl-risk.com, also provides practical and actionable resources including articles, checklists, and template policies focused on the most relevant legislation, employment, and workplace trends. Specifically, a **Disease/Epidemic Control model workplace policy** is available.

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