



VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY

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Pandemic Plan for Influenza and other Communicable Disease

DISCLAIMER: This document will remain in draft form as this is a living document that will change based on current events.

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Introduction

In the event that the World Health Organization (WHO) declares a worldwide pandemic or communicable disease outbreak, the Vancouver Island University (VIU) Pandemic Plan, which forms part of the VIU Emergency Preparedness Plan, will be activated. The activation of the plan will ensure that the University is able to respond and recover from a pandemic situation. The goals of the Pandemic Influenza Plan are to:

- Maintain essential services
- Educate employees and students to minimize spread if influenza or communicable disease
- Define roles and responsibilities

If a pandemic is declared, daily business operations will vary depending on the each situation. Coordination and support between all levels of government and health authorities is critical. The University will ensure that essential services are maintained for as long as possible to minimize the impact on employees and students. To ensure that essential services are maintained, non-essential services may be scaled back or in some cases discontinued. The University will look to the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) for guidance and direction as well as the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) for overall updates and information.

Internal and External communications are a critical component to the Pandemic Plan providing strategies to increase awareness and self preparedness among employees, students and visiting populations.

What is Influenza?

Influenza is a virus that is typically a seasonal occurrence in Canada. Influenza is commonly referred to as the flu; it is an infectious disease (virus) that affects birds and mammals. The most common symptoms of the disease are chills, fever, sore throat, muscle pains, severe headache, coughing, weakness and general discomfort.

Typically, influenza is transmitted through the air by coughs or sneezes, creating aerosols containing the virus. Infection can also occur through contact with these body fluids or through contact with contaminated surfaces. Airborne aerosols have been thought to cause most infections. Frequent hand washing reduces the risk of infection.

An adult can spread the virus from about one day before to five days after symptoms start. Children can spread the virus up to 21 days after symptoms start. Understanding the means of transmission is essential in decisions to control infection and reduce the exposure.

What is a Pandemic?

A Pandemic is an epidemic of communicable disease that is spreading through human populations across a large region such as a continent, or even worldwide. Pandemics are associated with high levels of illness, death, social disruption, and economic loss.

According to the WHO, a pandemic can start when three conditions have been met:

- Emergence of a disease new to a population
- Agents infect humans, causing serious illness
- Agents spread easily and are sustained among humans.

A disease or condition is not a pandemic merely because it is widespread or kills many people; it must also be infectious.

Activation Stages

There are a number of agencies that have responsibilities in pandemic planning and response. The WHO Phases guide the response of Federal, Provincial and local governments and agencies. The chart below details the WHO phases and associated actions that VIU will undertake at each stage.

Chart 1 – Activation Stages

Activation Stages of Pandemic Plan		
World Health Organization		Vancouver Island University
Pre – Pandemic		
Phase 1	No animal influenza virus circulating among animals have been reported to cause infection in humans	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular activities• Liaise with health authority• Liaise with campus community• Ensure Pandemic Plan is current• Enhanced promotion of hygiene
Phase 2	An animal influenza virus circulating in domesticated or wild animals is known to have caused infection in humans and is therefore considered a specific potential pandemic threat	

Pandemic Alert		
Phase 3	An animal or human animal influenza reassortant virus has caused sporadic cases or small clusters of disease in people, but has not resulted in human to human transmission sufficient to sustain community level outbreaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remain aware of global situation • Distribute information materials, website, posters, communications • Establish communications with health authority • Establish regular communications with Emergency Management Committee (EMC), and the Policy Group • Increases preventative measures by increasing education around hygiene and prevention of transmission. • Provide email alerts to campus community as needed. • Stay up to date with global and regional news • Monitor and discuss current and impending University travel • Departments should review or update business continuity plans in the event of sustained absences by employees • Faculties should review absenteeism policies for students • Quarantine or isolation planning for affected areas • Prepare for specialized cleaning
Phase 4	Human to human transmission of an animal or human–animal influenza reassortant virus able to sustain community level outbreaks has been verified	
Phase 5	The same identified virus has caused sustained community level outbreaks in two or more countries in one WHO region	
Pandemic Period		
Phase 6	In addition to the criteria defined in Phase 5, the same virus has caused sustained community level outbreaks in at least one other country in another WHO region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activate the EOC as needed • Continue providing updates to campus community via email and website • Obtain direction from the health authority on an ongoing basis • Stay up to date with global and regional news

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay up to date with WHO updates, BC Provincial Emergency Program, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada • Meet with high risk groups (i.e. student housing, international education, etc.) on an individual basis to deal with specific issues as needed • Carry out plans and adapt them for isolation, cleaning and business continuity • Consider utilizing social distancing practices by cancelling events with large gatherings of people
Post Pandemic Period		
	<p>Levels of influenza activity have returned to the levels seen for seasonal in most countries with adequate surveillance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return to phase 1 activities • Recovery phase • Debrief

Overall Roles and Responsibilities

World Health Organization (WHO)

WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends. WHO monitors the appearance of new strains of influenza and the number of confirmed cases and deaths around the world. WHO provides frequent updates on their website and notifies federal health authorities and provides information to the federal government, the media and the public on novel strains and prevention.

Federal

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is the main Government of Canada agency responsible for public health in Canada. PHAC's primary goal is to strengthen Canada's

capacity to protect and improve the health of Canadians and to help reduce pressures on the health-care system. Because public health is a shared responsibility, the Public Health Agency of Canada works in close collaboration with all levels of government (provincial, territorial and municipal) to build on each others' skills and strengths. The Agency also works closely with non-government organizations, including civil society and business, and other countries and international organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) to share knowledge, expertise and experiences.

Health Authority

At the local and regional level the lead agency is the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) through the Chief Medical Health Officer.

Provincial Emergency Program (PEP)

PEP is the agency that coordinates the overall government response to any major emergency and provides support to both Provincial departments and local governments. Monitoring and response is done through the Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre (PREOC). The PREOC coordinates all regional emergency response activities and supports provincial and local government efforts in dealing with emergency situations including Pandemic.

Vancouver Island University

VIU's primary responsibilities are to its employees, students and the public. Protecting the workforce will help avoid interruptions to essential services, and may require creative measures for infection control. VIU will work closely with the Vancouver Island Health Authority to develop strategies and will follow their lead with respect to decision making.

Pre- Planning Measures

There are three major areas to address in a potential pandemic situation:

Health and Inter-Agency Co-ordination

Following any indications of a major influenza outbreak or potential pandemic, VIU's Health and Safety Services (HSS) department will begin liaising with VIHA while determining initial measures to be taken. In addition, HSS will work with VIHA to ensure consistency in communications, internally and to the public. Communication and sharing of information is critical when facing a potential pandemic threat. The information and coordination of information are mutually dependent from the lead agency all the way through to the departmental level at VIU.

Communication

The communication surrounding a possible pandemic situation is critical to ensure both an appropriate response as well as to avoid unnecessarily escalating degrees of concern and panic. Basic communication is essential to ensure staff and the public are aware of precautions they can take to prevent any outbreak. Communication needs to be coordinated with the Health Agencies and can include the full array of communication measures such as email, web site, media messaging, etc. Trying to ensure media responses are coordinated and appropriate can reduce additional impacts such as unnecessary travel warnings, restrictions on movement and goods and the subsequent economic impacts.

Exposure Control Planning

Precautionary Measures

The best protection against influenza is vaccination. In the initial stages of a pandemic of influenza, vaccines may not be available. At that time, the first line of defence in limiting and controlling any disease outbreak is solid education on infection control. This includes:

Good Hygiene:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand cleansers, especially after you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid close contact with sick people and avoid touching eyes nose and mouth.

Sick Procedures: Employees or students presenting symptoms should stay home and limit contact with people in order to keep from infecting others.

Good Health: Maintaining good health through proper diet, exercise, plenty of fluids and rest reduces the potential of being infected.

Sick Leave Protocols: Sick leave protocols are the same as normal for each of the bargaining groups. Employees who are symptomatic are encouraged to stay home.

Reporting illness:

Employees: Employees are encouraged to report flu like symptoms to their HR Advisor who will report it to Health and Safety Services.

Students: Students are encouraged to report flu like symptoms to their instructors who will report it to Health and Safety Services.

Health and Safety Services (HSS) may be asked by VIHA to report significant absences in order to aid provincial or municipal illness tracking.

Vaccinations: General flu vaccinations can reduce the chance of catching influenza and reduce the severity. Specific vaccinations can be developed for specific outbreaks which can then be provided as needed and as advised by the local health authority or the provincial government.

Pandemic Response

Emergency Operations Centre

VIU's Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) will be activated at onset of Stage 6 of a pandemic or earlier if deemed necessary. The EOC would be activated during a confirmed pandemic or in response to internal needs and pressures that have resulted from the illness prior to a pandemic declaration. EOC staff would be briefed on precautionary measures to minimize the chance of EOC staff being infected, however if staff are symptomatic they would be asked to refrain from entering the EOC.

The EOC would work with the Policy Group in the event that cancellation of classes, travel or other activities becomes necessary or campus closures are required. Communications to employees and students would be ongoing to ensure up to date information is provided. Additional communications would be provided to the Policy group to address specific work issues relative to staffing, business continuity and preventative measures and status information.

- Internal staff communication such as prevention information will be provided by HSS to ensure information is consistent with the local health authority.
- Communication to the Policy Group will be provided direct from the EOC Director.
- Communication to the public will be disseminated through Communications and Public Relations.

EOC ROLES

- Utilize the VIU Emergency Preparedness Plan
- Liaise with PREOC (Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre) and other Agencies as required
- Consult with VIHA on levels of protective care and procedures
- Be aware of overall staff levels and absenteeism
- Work with Departments on Business Continuity
- Work with department and residence on managing illness and isolation

- Consult with VIHA on movement of people and goods in and out of the area
- Ensure emergency services can function and bring in assistance from outside agencies should they be required.

EOC Policy Group

The EOC Policy Group will lead decisions on cancellation of classes, travel or activities and closure of any VIU site(s) as well as provide overall policy direction to the EOC.

GENERAL PRECAUTIONS

- Ensure employees and students are educated on Pandemic information and status
- Implement preventative measures wherever possible
- Provide stronger focus on email and phone communication
- Ensure sick employees and students are encouraged to stay home
- Determine essential services
- Cease Non-Essential Services if staff levels drop
- Document employee availability and sick levels and send to HSS
- Confirm with EOC if services are being reduced and/or eliminated
- Consider social distancing measures by cancelling events or large gatherings.

Health and Safety Services

- EOC Management and lead department for planning, information and response.
- Provide Pandemic updates to employees and students
- Oversee precautionary measures such as signage, hand washing stations etc.
- Conduct education sessions as required for employees and students
- Conduct risk assessments as required

Other Departments

Multiple departments at VIU will be involved in managing the pandemic response and recovery. These departments will receive direction from the EOC.

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