

POLICY # PS 008

PANDEMIC POLICY

DEPARTMENT: Protective Services

APPROVAL DATE:	March 31, 2020 (2020-03-27)
REVISION DATE (s):	
REVIEW DATE (s):	

GUIDING DOCUMENTATION

- Municipal Government Act
- Emergency Management Act 2000
- Alberta Occupation Health & Safety Code
- County of Vermilion River Policy PE 001
- County of Vermilion River Policy PE 008

DEFINITIONS

In this Policy:

Alberta Health (Ministry of Health): Sets healthcare legislation and policy. Alberta's coordinating provincial authority for pandemic planning, response and recovery.

Alberta Health Services: Implements and provides healthcare services and programs including actions in response to a pandemic.

Health Canada: In regard to pandemics Health Canada is responsible for approval and distribution of vaccines.

PHAC (Public Health Authority of Canada): At a federal level is the agency responsible for coordinating risks to public health.

WHO (World Health Organization): The World Health Organization (WHO) monitors outbreaks of illness on a global scale and coordinates international response.

POLICY STATEMENT

As part of emergency preparedness and planning the County of Vermilion River has established pandemic guidelines herein to provide for continuity of essential services and a safe workplace for employees in order to ensure a safe and viable community.

BACKGROUND

Spread of pandemic influenza can be worldwide in scale. Because pandemics are caused by new strains of influenza, vaccines cannot be created until the new strain emerges. This could cause supply chain disruptions, employee absenteeism and continuity of service challenges including disruption to mutual aid agreements. A pandemic is expected to arrive in multiple waves before containment is achieved.

Pandemic influenza is spread by:

- **Direct Contact:** Respiratory droplets released when a person coughs, sneezes or talks traveling up to 2 meters in the air before landing.
- **Airborne:** Smaller infected respiratory droplets may hang in the air or be transmitted through inhalation.
- **Contact with Infected Services:** Hard or porous surfaces infected with respiratory droplets (doorknobs, desks, clothing, etc.)

Pandemic influenza virus survival times:¹

- **Refer to Alberta Health Services guidelines**

INFORMATION FLOW & AUTHORITY

Information Flow:

- The World Health Organization has the authority to declare a Public Health Emergency of International Concern and will notify the Public Health Agency of Canada if a new illness is detected.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada will notify provincial health authorities – Alberta Health & Alberta Health Services.
- Alberta Health will provide information to professional regulatory bodies and coordinate media response in coordination with Alberta Health Services.
- Alberta Health Services will then notify and share information with health care providers in their jurisdiction to implement pandemic response actions for healthcare at local levels.

Authority:

- The lead authorities to a pandemic affecting Alberta will be Alberta Health & Alberta Health Services.
- The local authority (County of Vermilion River) will act to support local healthcare services as requested.
- The local authority cannot declare a State of Local Emergency for areas in which a Public Health Emergency has already been declared.

¹ Government of Alberta (2014). *Alberta's Pandemic Influenza Plan* p. 12

Government of Alberta, Work Safe AB (2009). *Best Practice Guidelines for Workplace Health & Safety During Pandemic Influenza*. p. 8.

Assiniboine Regional Health Authority Pandemic Plan (2009). p. 13-2, 4-5, 4-36.

TRIGGERS

Global Triggers:

- The World Health organization has four (4) levels of pandemic phases to trigger preparation and response actions. The 4 phases are:²
 - **Interpandemic Phase:** The period between influenza pandemics
 - **Alert Phase:** When a new influenza subtype has been identified in humans.
 - **Pandemic Phase:** The period of global spread of the new influenza subtype.
 - **Transition Phase:** Reduction of risk and de-escalation of global actions

Provincial Triggers³:

- The following information has been summarized:
 - **Pandemic Virus Detected in Alberta:** Increasing health sector capacity, preparation for vaccine distribution, public health communications, implementing of clinical guidelines.
 - **Second or Subsequent Waves:** Immunization, surveillance for strain changes and resistance.

Local Authority Triggers

- The County of Vermilion River shall remain in a state of readiness for implementation of the pandemic response policy as part of their overall emergency management planning and program
- **Pandemic Phase:** Once the Pandemic Phase or global spread of a new influenza subtype is announced and due to the potential rapid rate of spread the County will begin to implement the following pandemic preparedness activities including:
 - *Review of Service Assessment:* Review of any existing business continuity plans and/or critical, vital and necessary services and capacity to meet each including identification of any services that may be temporarily suspended.
 - *Work Site Pandemic Hazard Assessments:* Completed to identify high, medium and low exposure jobs.
 - *Review Pandemic Hazard Control Options*
 - *Review Current Human Resource Policies and Procedures:* Personnel sick time or leave procedures and communication regarding these with personnel.
 - *Prevention Communication with Personnel:* Sharing actions to take to prevent spread of influenza including posted signage and additional sanitation and hygiene supplies made available.
- **Pandemic Influenza Detected in Alberta:** Once the pandemic has been detected in Alberta, the County shall implement the following actions:
 - *Mitigate potential supply chain challenges:* Stockpiling frequently ordered items.

² Government of Alberta (2014), p. 12 *Alberta's Pandemic Influenza Plan* p. 16

³ Government of Alberta (2014), p. 12 *Alberta's Pandemic Influenza Plan* p. 17



- *Implement pre-determined workplace sanitation requirements*
- *Review and implement pre-determined and appropriate workplace control mechanisms*
- *Communicate with local healthcare representatives: Determine how the County may be able to support response operations which may include the following:*
 - Coordinate transportation services to vaccine centres.
 - Coordinate and provide alternate sites or facilities to set-up mass vaccine centres or Influenza Assessment Centres.
 - Distribute approved pandemic information to the public and personnel.
 - Ensure the County is prepared to support personnel and implement control measures to reduce pressure on local healthcare services.

PANDEMIC PERSONNEL PROCEDURES

- Employees who wish to go to or wait at a clinic to obtain immunization will be permitted to do so during regular work hours. Employees will be asked to choose a location as close as possible to the County office and to coordinate absenteeism so that departments can continue to provide a basic level of service to the public.
- Employees who are ill due to pandemic influenza shall not report to work and must ensure they are fully recovered before returning to work in order to prevent further spread of illness. An employee who is not ill but who is quarantined or isolated by an order can access any sick or overtime entitlement they have accumulated.
- Current illness leave provisions, procedures and practice will continue to apply (Policy PE 008) however the requirement for a doctor note after three (3) days will be waived during a pandemic. During a pandemic the limitation family sick days (3) days per family member will be waived.
- The County will strive to be flexible in accommodating requests for time off or arranging alternate or from home working hours for employees who need to be away from work to care for family members who are ill (Policy PE 001 applies). In the even that Family Leave entitlements have been exhausted or the employee is not eligible for Family Leave, the employee may use other entitlements such as their own sick time, banked overtime, earned time off or vacation accrued. At the discretion of the CAO sick time during a pandemic may be extended for those who do not have earned time off or vacation accrual.
- Employees may be re-assigned from current roles to other roles when services are impacted by the pandemic. Supervisors will have the discretion to reassign employees taking into consideration employee's preferences and abilities whenever possible. No employee will be required to perform a function they cannot perform safely. All professional certifications, regulatory requirements and required memberships in professional bodies will be adhered to when re-assigning employees. Training will be provided in order to safely perform new functions.
- Compensation rates and any hours worked in excess of employees' regular daily or weekly hours will be accumulated or compensated the same as usual however Flex and Earned Day Off may have to be suspended during this time.
- Employee return to work policy will be as per directed by Alberta Health Services.



OTHER POLICIES & PROCEDURES

In consultation with County Council, the County administration office may be closed to the public. Customer service will still be provided as possible via phone, drop-off mail and internet.

The County Administrator or Department Director may make alternations to service levels, standard practice and timelines as outlined in other existing policies and guidelines as necessary during a pandemic.

WORKPLACE & HAZARD ASSESSMENTS

Employees will strive to continue to provide all normal services possible reverting to critical and essential service if required until the departments have sufficient staff to resume all services in the normal timeframe. Critical or essential services may vary depending on time of year and other variables.

The following assessments should be conducted by the Managing Director in coordination with a Safety Officer of the County.

- *Service Assessment:*
 - Staged and varying levels of service may be provided and will be determined based on impact of pandemic.
 - All critical staff positions should have an alternate staff member that has the appropriate training, skills, knowledge and experience available who can temporarily, and safely perform the functions of the job.
 - Ensure that there are no interdependencies in critical staff roles to prevent cascading effect should the required employee(s) be absent. Ensure staff redundancy and capacity in critical roles. Determine and categorize additional County services into the following categories:

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	SERVICES
Critical	Threat to life. Essential services without which immediate loss of life could result. Services that could not be disrupted for more than 24 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire and Emergency Services • Water and Sewer Operations • Public Works • Natural Gas
Vital	Lack of these services could result in secondary disaster. Services that could not be disrupted for more than 48 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Works • Natural Gas
Necessary	Necessary for community to continue to function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration including internal and external communication • Payroll and banking
Desired	Services that could temporarily be suspended for two (2) weeks or more	

- Worksite Pandemic Assessment⁴

EXPOSURE LEVEL	WORKSITE/JOB DESCRIPTION	RECOMMENDED ACTION
Minimal Exposure Job Tasks No contact to influenza infected persons in the workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs performed outdoors with good ventilation. • Does not require close contact with other individuals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take precautions as recommended by Alberta Health Services
Lower Exposure Job Tasks Workers may be exposed to infected persons from time to time in large well-ventilated workspaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occasional contact with the public in outdoor, well ventilated spaces. • Job tasks allow for more than two (2) meters distance between individuals personnel may be working with. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take precautions as recommended by Alberta Health Services • Put control in place to limit contaminations
Higher Exposure Job Tasks Workers have contact with symptomatic infected person(s) in small poorly ventilated workspaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires close contact (two (2) meters or less) with symptomatic or confirmed pandemic case. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform with recommended protections only in emergency situations

PREPAREDNESS, PREVENTION & WORKPLACE CONTROLS

Preparedness: Below are suggested actions that can be taken prior to the onset of a pandemic in order to increase the County's redundancy. Each suggestion should be evaluated in its practicality before being implemented.

- Cross training of employees to increase capacity
- Maintain a roster or turn-over list of seasonal staff/recently retired employees/volunteers who are competent in filling less critical roles and allowing other current and more senior staff to fill critical roles as alternates.
- Regular review of proper hand washing, flu prevention and cough/sneeze etiquette for personnel.
- Provisions of adequate sanitation supplies including hand sanitizer, soap, tissues, disinfectant.
- Implement workspace cleanliness requirements.
- Identify biggest risks or vulnerabilities in supply chain/delivery services by department and identify alternate sources.

Prevention: The following suggestions are those which may be put in place once a new strain of influenza has been identified and spread is likely to Canada.

⁴ Government of Alberta, Work Safe AB (2009). *Best Practice Guidelines for Workplace Health & Safety During Pandemic Influenza*. p. 12.



- Pre-stock frequently utilized supplies, beware of expiry dates, restock supply when available.
- Determine how long physical resources can go without maintenance, parts, supplies before they create a safety/health risk or must be shut down.
- Identify personnel that could work from home and provide the necessary supplies.
- Provide employees with refresher to pandemic guidelines, human resource requirements or changes to procedures resulting from pandemic.
- Encourage personnel to self-identify if they encounter symptoms or suspect exposure to pandemic influenza according to Alberta Health Services directives.

Workplace Controls: Below are suggestions for workplace control mechanisms in response to a pandemic. Each control should be evaluated before a decision on implementation is made.

ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROLS
• Enforce handwashing procedures.
• Enforce cough/sneeze etiquette.
• Enforce workspace cleanliness requirements/procedures.
• Increase level of janitorial services.
• Restrict workers displaying pandemic influenza symptoms from reporting to work.
• Accommodate work from home arrangements and/or employees to work from alternate locations.
• Implement flexible work arrangements including allowing staggered start/end times and/or dates.
• Allow personnel time to access vaccine (if/when it becomes available).
• Closure of County Administration Office.
• Manage other policies and procedures.
• Job Training (ex: cross-training).
Personal Protective Equipment Controls
• Gloves
• Eye protection
• Surgical masks or approved respirator
* To use surgical masks as a protective control measure, they must be combined with other controls. ⁵
Engineering Controls
• Ventilation
• Physical Barriers (ex: Plexiglas)
Combination
• A combination of the above controls.

^{5 5} Government of Alberta, Work Safe AB (2009). *Best Practice Guidelines for Workplace Health & Safety During Pandemic Influenza*. p. 22.



OTHER PANDEMIC PROVISIONS

A pandemic could have far-reaching psychosocial impacts on employees. The County will endeavor to ensure that mental health services are in place and easily accessible for all employees.

The County will encourage employees to use mental health or psychosocial services available during and/or following pandemic as needed.

A review of the County's policies, procedures, preparation and response will be completed following a pandemic. Recommendations for changes to policies collected from employee feedback will be identified. Council will consider these recommendations and changes to this policy may be made.

APPENDIX

Staying Healthy at Work:

- Eat at your own desk or away from others (or go home for lunch, avoid crowded restaurants, etc.)
- Consider use of Skype, FaceTime or other video conferencing and telephone conferencing applications (depending on the severity of the pandemic, this can even be an option for staff within the same office building).
- For meeting that must be face-to-face, ensure it is in a large well-ventilated room where everyone can be at least 2 metres apart. A better option may be to meet outdoors for maximum ventilation.
- Avoid hand shaking, hugging, etc.
- Encourage clients, members of public, etc. for which you have meetings with to meet or provide info via alternate means (phone, fax, email, video and telephone conferencing).
- In more extreme cases it may be necessary for employees to be scheduled on rotating shifts that avoid face-to-face contact and/or consider the potential of employees to work from home via computer, remote access and consider forwarding phones.
- Drive, walk or ride your bike (rather than carpool).
- Keep office door closed.
- Use stairs instead of elevators.
- Remove all brochures, magazines, books, etc. from waiting areas, coffee and break rooms. ⁶
- Cancellation of stand up meeting on Tuesday and Thursdays during pandemic situation
- Remove any unwrapped candy or communal food such as donuts, sugar cubes

Remember: symptoms that you have the flu may not appear immediately. Always follow proper cough and sneeze etiquette whether you think you have the flu or not!

Hand Washing Techniques Courtesy of Health Canada (www.hc-sc.gc.ca):

⁶ Assiniboine Regional Health Authority



Hands spread an estimated **80%** of common infectious diseases.⁷ The following info may be provided to employees as a reminder about the importance of hand washing and that there is a technique for it to be most effective.

Proper Hand Washing with Soap:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. In most cases antibacterial soap is not necessary for safe, effective hand hygiene.
- Remove any hand or arm jewelry you may be wearing and wet your hands with warm water. Add regular soap and rub your hands together, ensuring you have lathered all surfaces for at least 15 seconds. How long is 15 seconds? The length of time it takes to sign *Happy Birthday*.
- Wash the front and back of your hands, as well as between your fingers and under your nails.
- Rinse your hands well under warm running water, using a rubbing motion.
- Wipe and dry your hands gently with a paper towel or a clean towel
- Turn off the tap using the paper towel so that you do not re-contaminate your hands.
- When using a public bathroom, use the same paper towel to open the door when you leave.
- If skin dryness is a problem, use a moisturizing lotion.
- If you have sensitive skin or are in a position where you must wash your hands constantly, you might want to use an alcohol-based hand rub instead.
- Wash your hands often, especially after coughing, sneezing or using tissues, before and after eating, before preparing food, after handling raw meat, after petting an animal, and after using the bathroom.
- If you use bar soap, keep it in a self-draining holder that can be cleaned thoroughly before a new bar is added.
- Don't use a standing basin of water to rinse your hands.
- Don't use a common hand towel.

Proper Technique for Using Alcohol-based Hand Sanitizer:

- If your hands are visibly soiled, it is best to use soap and water. If it's not possible to wash with soap and water, use towelettes to remove the soil, then use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Use hand rubs according to the manufacturer's instructions. Make sure your hands are dry, as wet hands will dilute the product.
- Use enough product to cover all the surfaces of your hands and fingers.
- Rub your hands together until the product has evaporated. If dry skin is a problem, use a moisturizing lotion.

Cough/Sneeze Etiquette:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue
- Dispose of the tissue immediately in a proper garbage receptacle.

⁷ Public Health Agency of Canada



- Wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 15-20 seconds
- Use disposable tissues
- If you do not have a tissue cough into the crook of your elbow or your upper arm. Your sleeve will catch and trap respiratory droplets.
- If you do not have soap and water available to wash your hands, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer