

Since 2005, anyone reading the newspaper or clips on-line or watching a favorite news program has been made aware of the potential of a pandemic. What does that mean? What is a pandemic flu? How will it impact your business?

A pandemic is an illness that spreads all over the world and makes people sick. The most recent potential threat of a pandemic, or panflu, is from a naturally occurring, genetically modified form of the avian (bird) flu. According to experts, the avian flu may jump from a deadly illness affecting birds to a flu-like illness that sickens humans and in many cases, kills them. As stated in Nations Restaurant News in the February 19, 2007, edition in an article by Elissa Elan, federal health officials have noted that an outbreak "...could cause an estimated 89,000 to 207,000 deaths, 314,000 to 734,000 hospitalizations, 18 million to 42 million outpatient visits, and 20 million to 47 million additional illnesses...." Are you prepared for something like this?

The following questions may help you get started in your efforts to begin to be more prepared for an event of this nature. Dr. Joanne Brown of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services posed these questions to Florida's agricultural industry in Fall 2006 in preparation for the Statewide Farm to Fork Planning Meeting in January 2007. Many of these questions, with slight adjustments, can also be used by Florida's hospitality industry to prompt planning initiatives.

***Have you thought about how a pandemic might affect your business? Could you operate your business at full capacity? Would you have any guests to serve? Would you have employees to serve them?***

***What will be the impact on your industry with the loss of 40% of your workforce for 5 to 6 weeks?***

***How much of a stockpile of essential goods does your industry have on hand?***

***How much of your commodities are "in the pipeline"?***

***Do you have your own vehicles and trucks for distribution of product and how would a driver/fuel shortage affect your industry?***

***Has your industry developed a pandemic influenza preparedness plan for business?***

***Has your industry discussed the possible effects of pandemic influenza with their suppliers to know what kind of back up they may have for essential goods and services?***

***Has your industry had discussions on determining essential services and what can be cut in the event of a decrease in the workforce?***

***Has your industry had any discussions on administrative policies/guidelines for workers i.e. will they be paid if the government mandates social distancing and***

***someone must stay home with children because the schools are closed or if they must stay home to care for a sick family member?***

***If your business was completely shut down for 3 weeks, how long would it take for your to be back in business, partially and completely with all services?***

If you feel like your answers to these questions reveal that you are not prepared, do not feel alone. According to Elissa Elan in the Nations Restaurant News article noted above, many operations are not close to being fully prepared.

You can do something about it. Preparation for this type of an event should be in many ways similar to any other crisis. You should develop a plan to assist you during a crisis, and you should exercise it to determine that you've planned for expected contingencies. Understand that a disaster is a disaster because it is an overwhelming event. You may never plan for all you might encounter in a disaster, but managing for the basics will give you a good place to start.

Serving more than 10,000 members across Florida, FRLA is committed to safe-guarding the needs of the hospitality industry and improving the business climate. Led by CEO, Carol Dover and an active Board of Directors, FLRA has influenced legislation that has saved the industry \$1.2 billion in taxes and fees over the past decade. Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association is also part of a strategic alliance with VISIT FLORIDA., the state's marketing arm. To learn more about the FRLA, visit [www.frla.org](http://www.frla.org) or call 888-372-9119 to find out how you can get involved.

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