

# Pandemic Planning Guide and Assumptions

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Epidemics, which are outbreaks of a disease that occur within a short period of time and in a defined Region, have the potential to significantly affect an organization's operations and the health and safety of personnel and the general public. Epidemics can become a pandemic when an epidemic occurs on a worldwide scale.

The [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC) is responding to an outbreak of respiratory disease caused by a novel (new) coronavirus that was first detected in China and detected in locations internationally and in the United States. The disease it causes has been named "coronavirus disease 2019" (abbreviated "COVID-19").

This guidance document and the [Mission Essential Function \(MEF\) planning tool](#) has been developed to aid agencies and departments through preparedness planning and response process to ensure the continuity of vital services and operations during the outbreak of COVID-19 cases in Vermont.

To accelerate preparedness planning and response efforts, the [MEF planning tool](#) has been developed by extracting relevant fields from the existing Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) document. The MEF planning tool identifies key information agencies and departments should consider when planning for an outbreak of COVID-19 and associated staffing shortages.

## Pandemic Planning Assumptions

While there is no broad evidence regarding the level of absenteeism that will be caused by COVID-19, agencies and departments are directed to use **the same assumptions for the pandemic influenza** found in existing COOP plans:

- Susceptibility to the pandemic will be universal.
- The clinical disease attack rate will be 30 percent in the overall population. Among working adults, an average of 20 percent could become ill during a community outbreak.
- In an affected community, an outbreak will typically last about 6 to 8 weeks.

## Pandemic Planning Strategies

Unlike other emergency situations, an epidemic could seriously disrupt an organization's operations for an extended period. Therefore, both short- and long-term strategies are necessary to manage the potential extent and duration of the impact.

Each organization should have the capacity to perform all MEFs. **MEFs are the limited set of agency and department level government functions that must be continued throughout a disruption of normal operations. MEFs are functions that cannot be deferred during an emergency or disaster, such as vital public services and protecting public safety.** These functions may need to be performed with limited staff, and when little to no face-to-face contact is possible for an extended period. Some MEFs must be performed at the physical place of work. In both cases, agencies and departments should develop

strategies to maintain MEFs assuming a **staffing shortage of 20% for a month or more**. These strategies could include, but are not limited to:

1. Reassigning employees who do not perform a MEF to perform MEFs.
2. Leveraging service contracts to help perform MEFs.
3. Performing MEFs as best you can.

For those agencies and departments that rely on vendors or other agencies and departments to perform MEFs, agencies and departments should reach out to those organizations to ensure they can provide continuous service. If not, agencies and departments will need to develop another strategy to perform these MEF.

### **Workforce Planning**

Agencies and departments should develop a skills inventory for those positions that are essential to continuing their mission-critical functions. Agencies and departments should consider cross-training and skill development for employees who can assume responsibility for carrying out MEFs, which may lie beyond their normal scope of responsibility. With this strategy, should key personnel fall ill, critical functions would then continue with minimal impact to operations. Employees should also be informed that they may be asked to exercise authority or perform duties outside their typical job responsibilities.

While developing this skills inventory, agencies and departments should pay particular attention to those positions for which cross-training is not feasible, such as those that require specialized training or qualifications. Agencies and departments should consider contingency plans should the personnel in those positions be unavailable. This includes identifying, in advance, possible sources for temporary replacement personnel.

### **Records and Resources**

Once an agency or department has defined its MEFs and developed workforce planning strategies, the next step is to identify the records and resources needed to carry out MEFs. Records are physical and electronic documents that are needed to perform mission essential functions. Resources may include access to a computer, phone, and the internet.

### **Identifying Planning and Resource Gaps**

Following the pandemic planning process includes identifying MEFs and associated workforce planning strategies and resource needs. Agencies and departments should clearly identify planning and resource gaps in the [MEF planning tool](#).