

Pandemic planning in the workplace

Border control

Governments may use border control measures to delay the spread of a pandemic to Australia. To be effective, these measures would need to be implemented early in the development of a pandemic overseas. Such measures would have ramifications for the Australian community, and would only be undertaken on the basis of health advice.

Border control measures may include: recommending that people do not travel to or from affected countries; requiring arriving air and sea crew to report to Australian authorities anyone on their vessel who is sick; asking travellers whether they have been in contact with people who have influenza symptoms; screening passengers (to check for symptoms); or refusing international vessels entry into Australia's air or sea ports.

Containment

Containment refers to a wide range of measures that may be put in place as soon as a pandemic occurs, to contain its spread. During the "containment phase" of responding to a pandemic, measures implemented might include: border control; efforts to test and confirm human infection as quickly as possible; the use of antivirals; home quarantine; and social distancing.

Maintenance

If containment is effective, Australia may not experience a widespread pandemic. However, if containment is not possible, governments may move to focusing all efforts on maintaining essential services to the community and businesses (those services needed to maintain a minimum level of functioning within society, for example water, energy, food and sewerage).

Quarantine and isolation

Human quarantine and isolation activities aim to prevent the disease entering Australia, and to control and eradicate the disease when identified.

If international borders remain open, Australians arriving from affected countries may be asked to remain in home quarantine for a period (perhaps one week) until it is clear that they are not infected. If the traveller becomes ill, household members may also be asked to stay at home to prevent further spread.

Quarantine does not just apply to international travelers. Australians with influenza symptoms could be advised to stay at home or may be cared for in hospital (in isolation from other patients without pandemic influenza), depending upon the severity of disease. It may also be necessary to quarantine contacts (family or close friends) of influenza patients in their homes for about one week, in order to minimise the spread of the disease.

Social distancing

Social distancing refers to various measures that can be undertaken to reduce normal physical and social interaction to slow the spread of a pandemic throughout society. It is one part of the broader containment strategy.

The social distancing measures put in place during a pandemic will depend on the health advice at the time, and may vary between regions. Measures might include temporarily: closing schools and child care centres; modifying workplace arrangements so that people remain one-metre or more apart; cancelling public transport; and postponing public events.

To complement social distancing measures, people can also practise a range of personal infection control measures, such as cough and sneeze etiquette, wearing surgical masks in public and frequent effective hand washing.