

QMS-POL-99

MMA PANDEMIC PLAN (POLICY)



Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to document the Melbourne Market Authority's (MMA) preparation for and planned response to a declared pandemic, which may impact on the delivery of MMA services.

Whilst every potential outcome from a pandemic cannot be anticipated, this plan should be seen as a guide to the recommended actions that should be adopted in a pandemic situation. The actual actions taken will depend on the severity of the particular pandemic at a given time and how the pandemic impacts the MMA.

Whilst the focus of this plan is on a declared influenza pandemic situation and the plan is referred to as a pandemic plan, this plan, particularly the hygiene and isolation aspects of the plan, can also be applied in cases of widespread communicable diseases, such as gastroenteritis, in the community or within the MMA, e.g. epidemics.

This pandemic plan does not consider contingency arrangements for the operation of the Melbourne Wholesale Fruit, Vegetable and Flower Market (the Market) when there is a declared pandemic.

Objective of the Plan

The object of the plan is to protect the health and safety of MMA employees and minimise the impacts to MMA business during a declared pandemic via two main strategies

1. Containment of the disease by reducing the infection and spread within the MMA workplace; and
2. Maintenance of essential business services of the MMA at all times.

This plan provides direction on the following:

- Communication;
- Containment;
- Managing pandemics at work; and
- Actions required after the pandemic has eased.

Pre Pandemic

Background Information

Influenza pandemics with novel viruses are; recurring events, unpredictable, and can result in a range of health effects from mild, as was seen in the H1N1 2009 influenza strain (and as of 2020 with Covid-19), to serious effects, including death, to large portions of the population. In the case of influenza, an effective vaccine may not be available for 4 to 6 months after isolation of the particular influenza strain causing the pandemic.

The mode of transfer of the influenza is through spread of droplets from one person to another via coughing or sneezing, by touching things that are contaminated by respiratory secretions and then touching one's mouth, eyes or nose, or through the spread of particles in the air in crowded populations in enclosed spaces. Other communicable diseases are spread in much the same way and via physical contact with an infected individual.

It is envisaged that in the case of a severe pandemic up to 50% of employees will not be available to attend work as;

- they will be directly affected themselves;
- they will be caring for ill family members,
- they will need to remain at home to mind children due to the closing of school or
- they will be concerned that they may be affected if they do attend the workplace.

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There may also be a significant death rate, with permanent loss of people and expertise. Thus, there will be an effect on how and how much business is conducted during and post a pandemic.

Risk Management

Whilst it is not possible to document MMA's proposed response in all severity outcomes of a pandemic or communicable disease, MMA will adopt a pandemic response appropriate to the level of risk of the particular pandemic.

In determining the level of risk, MMA will rely on information provided and any assessment made by the Federal and State health departments as well as its own assessment based on the number of impacted employees, services and Market users.

MMA will ensure that it reviews supply levels of all essential materials to ensure that in the case additional supplies are required due to a pandemic they are available where possible.

Pandemic Response Plan

The following response plan is based on a worst-case scenario. Should the pandemic event not be as severe, the following response plan can be modified according to the level of risk to MMA employees and MMA operations.

1. Communication

The decision regarding activation of the Pandemic Response Plan and communicating with employees will be made by the CEO after consultation with the MMA Board, Managers and/or representatives from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, (DEECA) taking into account any Federal and State Government communications about the epidemic.

MMA will generally commence communication with its employees following direction of DEECA.

The nature and frequency of the communication is dependent on the severity of the pandemic and may be escalated up or de-escalated as the pandemic progresses.

Communication to employees during business hours will be ideally face to face and followed up by email. Communication after business hours, where required, will be made via email and/or phones as agreed between the MMA and its employees

Employees will be provided with the following information:

- links to relevant Government or external parties to access further official information;
- instructions regarding information numbers to call external to the MMA for information;
- to whom to report problems or concerns within the MMA, and
- General pandemic influenza information.

2. Containment

MMA has a number of containment activities already in place. MMA offers annual flu vaccinations to its employees and contractors. There is regular, wiping down with alcoholic swabs, of all telephones, computer keyboards and mouses. MMA offices and work areas, including toilets are cleaned daily.

As close contact with infected individuals or contaminated surfaces is the primary means of spread of influenza, the aim of MMA's pandemic response is also to minimise social interaction in the workplace while maintaining essential business functions

However, should the severity of a pandemic escalate, further containment actions may be taken. Some of these containment actions are detailed below.

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2.1 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Varying levels and types of PPE may be required depending on the level of exposure of employees and the risk of transmission of the influenza virus.

A disposable surgical mask and disposable gloves, if in likely contact with secretions, will provide sufficient protection from droplet transmission for persons in close contact with persons with pandemic influenza within the Market.

The only PPE recommended for use within the MMA offices would be for people with respiratory infection symptoms. They would be provided with a disposable surgical mask to prevent exposing others to their respiratory secretions.

Any mask must be disposed of as soon as it becomes moist, or after any cough or sneeze, in an appropriate lined waste receptacle and hands must be thoroughly washed and dried after the used mask has been discarded.

The use of gloves does not replace the need for hand washing.

Education and training is necessary to ensure the PPE is used and disposed of correctly and will be provided at the time of the provision of the equipment.

2.2 Social Distancing

Social distancing refers to strategies to reduce the frequency of contact between people. Social distancing would normally only be activated in a pandemic stage but may be implemented earlier on advice from the Department of Health.

Social distancing strategies that could be adopted by the MMA include:

- (a) Avoidance of face to face meetings.
 - (i) For office based MMA employees this would mean use of the telephone or email to conduct as much business as possible, even when participants are in the same building.
 - (ii) For MOs this may mean the issuing and wearing of PPE.
- (b) If a face-to-face meeting with people is unavoidable, contact with potentially infectious persons should be minimised by.
 - (i) reducing the meeting time;
 - (ii) choosing a large meeting room, e.g. the Board Room;
 - (iii) sitting at least one (1) metre away from each other if possible; and
 - (iv) avoiding human contact, e.g. avoid shaking hands.
- (c) Avoidance of any unnecessary travel and postponement or cancellation of non-essential meetings, gatherings or training sessions.
- (d) Where possible, arranging for identified critical employees who have the required equipment to work from home. This will be restricted to employees carrying out essential business functions and associated supporting employees who have been identified and approved to work from home.
- (e) Employees who continue to attend the workplace for maintenance of critical services, such as IT support and site maintenance, should seek to minimise close contact with others, avoid all unnecessary human contact and practice good hygiene measures.
- (f) Encourage MMA employees to bring their lunch and eat lunch at one's desk or away from others so that numbers in the lunch room are reduced
- (g) Avoidance of congregating in lunchrooms or other areas where people socialise

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2.3 Hygiene Practices

The following basic hygiene measures will be reinforced and MMA employees and Market users will be encouraged to practice them to minimise potential influenza transmission:

- Cover nose and mouth when sneezing and coughing, with a disposable single use tissue.
- Immediately dispose of used tissue.
- Adopt good hand washing/hand hygiene practices, particularly after coughing, sneezing or using tissues.
- Keep hands away from the mucous membranes of the eyes, mouth and nose after touching surfaces.
- Hygiene posters will be placed around MMA offices to remind employees of good hygiene practices.

The MMA will also ensure that adequate supplies of hand hygiene products are available during the pandemic planning stage.

2.4 Workplace Cleaning

The MMA will if necessary, review its current cleaning regime based on an assessment of the risk to employees.

A recommended cleaning regime follows. These are suggested minimum requirements which should be considered and adopted, unless MMA's cleaning contractors suggest a more appropriate cleaning regime.

Table 1: Table of a suggested cleaning schedule during a declared pandemic affecting MMA employees.

Cleaning Area	Cleaning Requirements
General Office - Individual workstations in offices and open plan environments	
Workstation and Desk Surfaces	Cleaning by warm water and detergent. Disinfection not necessary. Cleaning can be carried out by desk owner. Recommended daily clean.
Shared workstation and desk surfaces	Undertaken daily. Cleaning by warm water and detergent. Disinfection not necessary.
Kitchens	
Benches, tables, sinks, fridges and cupboard doors and handles	Cleaning to be carried out by contract cleaners Cleaning of surfaces undertaken daily. Cleaning to be undertaken by cleaners. Cleaning by warm water and detergent. Disinfection not necessary.
High Traffic areas - includes entrances to buildings, reception desks, information desks, stair rails, frequently used conference/meeting rooms	
Counters, tables, door handles, railings and light switch buttons etc./computer keyboards	Cleaning of surfaces undertaken twice daily. Cleaning to be undertaken by cleaners. Cleaning by warm water and detergent followed by use of a germicidal solution.
Wet Areas - includes toilets, showers and change rooms	
Door handles, toilet cisterns, buttons, taps, hand basins and benches	Cleaning of surfaces undertaken twice daily. Cleaning to be undertaken by cleaners. Cleaning by warm water and detergent followed by use of a germicidal solution.

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A change in the cleaning regime will need to be negotiated with the Market cleaning contractors.

The cleaning regime for common areas in the Market should also be reviewed in a declared pandemic, depending on the assessment of the risk to market users.

MMA employees have also been provided with alcoholic swabs to wipe down equipment particularly any common equipment, following its use to maintain clean surfaces that will reduce the spread of influenza.

3. Managing a Pandemic in the Workplace

3.1 Managing Fear

It is likely that during a pandemic there will be anxiety regarding the pandemic situation, and this may contribute to increased work absence and/or increased distress to employees.

In order to manage this anxiety, the following are proposed strategies to be adopted by the MMA:

- Communicate the possibility of a pandemic and MMA's preparedness to manage it, very early to employees.
- Communicate face-to-face wherever possible initially.
- Communicate the pandemic response clearly to employees.
- Provide clear and timely and proactive communications to employees when things are changing.
- Provide clear communication to employees and our Market community on how the MMA is handling the situation if the pandemic does occur.

3.2 Working from Home

As close contact with infected individuals or contaminated surfaces is the primary means of spread of influenza, it may be preferable to have employees working from home to reduce the potential spread of the influenza. Also, given that many employees may be required to care for sick family members at home, working from home is an option for ensuring the continuity of essential services of the MMA during a declared pandemic.

To this end, all identified critical employees in the provision of essential business functions will be provided with the means of working from home, if and where practicable.

To maximise business continuity and operational effectiveness from a remote location, these employees would have simultaneous access to telephones, electronic files and access to the shared drive, email and internet access. This would be provided by home broadband.

3.3 Managing Influenza Pandemic Cases within the MMA

If a manager suspects one of their employees is unwell, or if a person feels ill, then the employee should be provided with a hygiene mask and instructed to wear it immediately. This is to prevent further spread of any infection and help to protect other employees.

The employee will be asked to leave work immediately and be advised to contact their doctor.

MMA will identify and advise any other relevant employees immediately that they have been in contact with a person suspected of having influenza and ask them to visit a doctor if they begin to feel unwell.

The employee's work station should be cleaned and disinfected, to provide a level of reassurance to other employees.

The relevant manager will contact employees who are unexpectedly absent from work to track the health of employees. The Manager will check on the employee by phone during his/her absence from work. This will help to ensure employees do not feel isolated and assist the MMA to track their health.

Once employees are better, or at the end of a quarantine period, and once a certificate indicating the employee is fit to return to work is received by the employee's treating doctor, MMA will facilitate and encourage the employee to return to work.

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No employee or contractor should be permitted to return to work duties without a certificate declaring them free from influenza or the communicable disease

3.4 Recording of absenteeism

In the event of a pandemic MMA will initiate centralised recording and monitoring of absenteeism, including initialising a central "hotline" to advise of absences, once the absentee percentage reaches 25% nationally or in one or more offices.

3.5 Advising Suppliers

In the event of a pandemic MMA will also liaise with any suppliers to ensure that they are aware of any potential changes in working/delivery arrangement.

3.6 Workplace Entry of People with Influenza Symptoms

On declaration of a pandemic in Victoria, employees and visitors, including children, will be advised not to enter the premises if they have influenza symptoms. A notice to the effect will be posted at all workplace entry points. Similarly, notices should be placed on entry gates advising Market users not to enter the premises if they have influenza symptoms.

Market users exhibiting influenza like symptoms should not be permitted to enter a MMA workplace. Alternate arrangements for payments etc. from the market community should be accommodated and advised.

Employees will be advised not to come to work when they are feeling unwell, particularly if they are exhibiting any influenza symptoms. Unwell employees will be advised to seek medical advice and should stay at home until symptoms resolve.

MMA managers are in their right to ask employees, who they suspect are not well, to leave the workplace and return to the workplace only with a medical clearance certificate from a doctor.

No employee will be financially disadvantaged should they have insufficient leave to cover such absences, provided they supply a medical certificate indicating they are suffering contagious influenza/communicable disease symptoms.

3.7 Travelling Employees

If an employee has any travel planned, they should be sure to check for travel advisories on the area to which they are travelling. It is recommended that employees avoid all unnecessary travel, especially to areas heavily affected by the pandemic. If an employee has any international work-related travel, they should contact the MMA General Counsel in advance. MMA will assess whether the travel is necessary based on current known advisories and/or if business needs support an alternative to the travel, such as attendance in meetings by video or other means.

If an employee, a family member of an employee or someone with whom an employee resides in the same household has travelled an area where there are warnings in relation to the pandemic, the MMA employee should immediately contact the MMA General Counsel and should not report to work. Arrangements should be made for the employee to work remotely until it is evident that the MMA employee is not unwell. If an employee cannot work remotely, the MMA will work with that employee to assess risk associated with their return to work, and it may implement safety protocols for the employee and their co-workers, such as requiring them to wear a mask or other PPE.

4. Business Continuity

4.1 Business Continuity Considerations

Critical business functions are those that are absolutely necessary or indispensable in running a business.

MMA's critical business functions have been considered in MMA's Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plan, (BCP/DRP) and the contingencies, which should also be referred to in a pandemic situation, have been given in the BCP/DRP.

With an anticipated loss of up to 50% of MMA employees during a pandemic, some of which may be lost permanently in the case of a severe influenza pandemic, business planning for large scale employee absences and communication are key considerations in MMA's BCP/DRP. The planning should consider the short, medium and long-term issues.

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4.2 Incident Management

The occurrence of an influenza pandemic and its consequence will be managed as per MMA's BCP/DRP procedures.

Post Pandemic

A number of actions will be required following the initial impacts of a pandemic.

First and foremost, counselling should be offered to MMA employees in the case of a loss of a colleague, or family member.

The MMA should also review and update its response plan in light of any learnings, by the MMA or other departments or sectors, from pandemics.

MMA should be prepared to participate and contribute their findings to any forums held following pandemics.

5. Plan Update

5.1 Testing of the Plan

For the plan to be viable and effective, the plan should be regularly tested to ensure the proposed contingency arrangements are aligned with business requirements.

Testing of the plan can take a number of forms. An appropriate way to test the pandemic plan is through a desktop exercise where, through discussion the plan is used to generate a response to a particular scenario.

Each test should have a test plan and include objectives for the test. A post-test debrief or review to capture any issues and opportunities for improvement will also be held.

Findings from the testing of the plan and actions to be taken will be documented in a report to be presented to MMA management.

5.2 Review of the Plan

For the plan to be effective, it must be kept up to date and reflective of current systems, responsibilities and procedures.

This plan must be reviewed annually and updated to reflect changes identified and/or proposed as a result of testing of the plan and from lessons learnt from actual pandemics.

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PANDEMIC RESPONSE PLAN

Document History

Issue	Approved Date	Date of Issue	Author(s)/Title	Changes and Comments
1	March 2009	March 2009	Marisa Di Pietro Governance & Environment Manager	Initial Release Review document in light of H1N1 pandemic 2009
2	May 2011	May 2011	Marisa Di Pietro Governance & Environment Manager	Simplify document. Update communications channel. Include a risk approach to pandemic response. Broaden scope of plan from influenza only to any widespread communicable disease. Update relevant State departments. Remove appendices that related to WHO Pandemic levels and pandemic planning stages as information considered superfluous.
3	March 2020	March 2020	Malcolm Lum, General Counsel & Head of Property	Broad amendments to Policy Reviewed in line with the COVID-19 Also added QMS-PRO-99a
4	Aug 2023	Aug 2023	General Counsel Malcolm Lum	Reviewed Every 2 years

Document Review Schedule

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2	May 2011	May 2012	Marisa Di Pietro Governance & Environment Manager	Annual review
3	March 2020	March 2020	General Counsel Malcolm Lum	Reviewed in line with the COVID-19 Also added QMS-PRO-99a
4	Aug 2023	Aug 2023	General Counsel Malcolm Lum	Reviewed Every 2 years

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