

The
Broadcasters' Desktop Resource
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BROADCAST OPERATIONS

Keep the Flu out - Keep Your Staff In

[December 2018] It is that time of year again. The CDC has said 2018 is an above average year for influenzas. Many drug stores and supermarkets are displaying signs to remind shoppers to get a flu shot. And broadcast stations really need to have a plan well in place due to the close quarters in Control Rooms. Are you safe? Our annual reminder:

You likely have recently heard one of the more dreaded sounds of each flu season:
"AHHHHCHOOOO!"

That is certainly an especially unwelcome sound if you are sitting next to its source in a conference room or on a crowded airplane – where it is not easy to get away – and, suddenly, a misty cloud of virus germs is launched into the air.

The situation in a radio studio, with its confined space, could be just as bad. Anyone who thinks about it really would not want to work in a studio following a sick person who has been coughing and sneezing while talking into the microphone for several hours. Even saturating the room with a strong Lysol spraying might not give much of a sense of safety.

Of course, with the reduced staffing levels now at many stations, losing even one person to the flu (whether or not it is the H3N2) can cripple daily operations, especially if they are operating as a one-person department.

PLAN, PREVENT, PREVAIL

So, what can you do to protect yourself, your staff, and the station from succumbing to one of these "bugs?"

First of all, in the words of a famous book: "Don't Panic!"

True, there is cause for concern when a viral outbreak is reported. Unfortunately, many of the statements from various bureaucrats and health professionals carry conflicting messages and separating good advice from the alarmist attention-grabbing talking heads is not always easy. Nevertheless, it is well worth the time to review the policies and plans at your facility so as to make sure everything and everyone keeps functioning as well as possible.

Fortunately, by following a well-thought-out plan, problems can be minimized, and life will go on normally.

MORE THAN A FLU SHOT

It would be nice if you could get an inoculation and forget about catching the flu.

The problem is that the new flu vaccines released each year are based on scientists' best guesses about exactly which flu bugs will appear. Even if they guess right, it can take as long as two months for someone who was injected to develop immunity. Then, too, sometimes they guess wrong.

Worse, yet, even the most educated guesses can be rendered worthless in a matter of hours. Remember, with air travel, a flu strain that has not yet appeared in your town still can move around the world in less than a day. I know this from personal experience: after getting my flu shot two months before the NAB Show one year, I still got a very bad case from an interna-

tional visitor's variant flu virus strain, anyway – basically ending up in bed for a whole week.

As you can see, the enemy is not just one virus such as the H3N2 virus, but a whole range of flu bugs that circle the world every year. That is why now is the right time to put together a plan to deal with as many threats as possible, whether major or minor.

Giving serious thought to the various ways to reduce infection – and how to "cover" for ill workmates – will result in fewer infected staff members and less lost work time for all.

PROTECTION IS PREVENTION

Perhaps the most basic plan is the one that centers on prevention. Since few are in a position to move to a cave in the mountains for a few months, we have to deal with the working environment in which we find ourselves.

Broadcast engineer Stephan White points out us that "airborne germs are inhaled by unwitting recipients and they incubate in our mouths, throats, and nasal passages. All warm, damp environments [are] highly conducive to germ growth and retransmission." Irritated or inflamed nasal passages (from allergies or the wrong spray) can create an especially vulnerable gateway for germs to invade.

Unfortunately, it is probably not a viable plan to have the staff wear masks – especially the air staff. However, there is a lot that can be done to reduce the potential for transmitting the flu to everyone in the building.

CLEAN UP!

The first line of defense is cleanliness.

Without creating a Police State, try to make sure everyone washes their hands often – and with vigor. Alcohol wipes and/or hand sanitizers in appropriate places would be a good move. Have you noticed how many supermarkets, restaurants, and other places have installed dispensers in the past couple of years?





Both wall-mounted and personal-size dispensers are worth consideration. The personal units can be carried easily in a pocket like a pen or in a purse.

The key is to get into the habit of using them!

Another option has led to a boom in sales of liquid hand soap with an antibacterial agent in it. However, some experts suggest plain water and soap is just as effective, perhaps moreso as the antibacterial agent – usually triclosan or triclocarbon. In fact, the FDA has warned about these agents causing hormone imbalance issues or aiding in creating antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria.

AVOIDING TRANSFER

Clean hands also are important in preventing germs from spreading to surfaces where others could come in contact with them.

Similarly, the reduction of airborne germs is also vital – especially in those "close" places like a studio/control room.

That is why it is important to carefully clean all work surfaces. Disinfect the microphones and windscreens regularly. *Please note: This does not mean spraying them with Lysol* - that could actually kill the microphone. Better is to have several windscreens, rotating and cleansing them. And, did I mention that the whole staff should wash their hands frequently?

White also suggests using nasal sprays which, if used properly, can kill off most of the germs that try to enter that way. Salt water is good.

Overall, the cleaner that you and your office are kept, the less likely germs will find a place to stay – and strike out.

WHEN FLU STRIKES

If you are a manager or supervisor, you should make sure that your people deal with public health issues intelligently – and you should set the example.

While washing hands is important so that germs are not spread to surfaces where others could come in contact with them, reduction of air-borne germs is also vital – especially in those "close" places like a studio/control room.

Doctors say a rough cough or a single sneeze can put millions of little droplets in the air. To reduce the danger of infection to others, some remember the old advice: Put your hand over your mouth when you cough. However, while you could immediately run to wash your hands or use a hand sanitizer, health professionals now suggest that it might be better to cough into your elbow or sleeve.

Another idea: you could encourage your staff to carry and use a handkerchief – but also make sure to supply tissue paper in the control room and around the facility. Combined with routine cleaning and disinfection of surfaces, and use of an aerosol disinfectant or hepafilter, the chance of transmitting the flu bug (or others) is reduced significantly.

VITAMIN C

Some feel that flu season is the right time to take extra Vitamin C or other vitamins and to make sure you get sufficient rest each day. The reasoning: if you get overly tired, you are inviting bugs to take advantage of your weakened immune system.

Here is another tip: White recommends drinking a lot of hot coffee or tea because it "will wash those germs and viruses into the stomach where they cannot grow because there is no oxygen present to feed them. This and frequent gargling with an antiseptic mouthwash will go a long way to keep a person healthy."

One thing is certain: following these tips absolutely could not hurt!

SEND SICK FOLKS HOME

But what happens when someone does fall ill? Businesses with more than one employee probably know it is *not if, but when*, flu will strike. Someone *will* get sick.

This is where planning ahead brings everything together.

Do not hesitate: if someone on your staff falls ill have them visit their doctor and then go home.

Public Health authorities point out that prompt treatment with the right drugs often can help the person recover more quickly. These same officials also recommend infected persons should stay home until they get over the flu, lest they infect everyone who did not catch it the first time around.

Meanwhile, each department head should have a plan as to who can "cover" for each and every employee should they fall ill. This means sales, news and traffic, announcers, the receptionist … and engineering.



The Internet has offered some options that did not exist previously.

For example, if someone is at home and is on the mend, they might be able to do some – or all – of their job remotely, via VPN, without the danger of infecting others.

AN ACTION CHECKLIST

Here are some points that your plan should consider and plan for:

- Do you have an up-to-date contact list for the staff if you need to warn them?
- Does each staffer know who to contact if their boss is out?
- Is there a way they can contact the station – 24/7 – in case they fall ill? (Perhaps a specific email address or web page where *they* can make contact with the station?)
- Do you have an accurate up-to-date contact list for vendors and contractors, in case you need help with something (plumbing, air conditioning, etc) usually handled by someone who is ill?
- Is someone assigned to monitor the CDC, State and local health hotlines so you have current information on the status of local health issues, as well as tips for helping folks cope better.
- How capable is the office VPN server? Can it handle incoming requests from multiple stay-at-homers?
- Can you reduce meetings and conferences for the duration of the health alert?
- Can the "front desk" duties be handled remotely, reducing interaction with the public during a health alert period?

GIVE THEM TIME TO RECOVER

To repeat a key point: as much as you might want or need to get folks back to work, do not try to force people back into the building too soon – they might still be infectious and just make things worse.

The better your plan, the more seamless it will be in terms of making sure all important tasks are covered without exposing anyone to infection.

HANDLING DIFFICULT COVERAGE

Dealing with the loss of specialized staffers in your facility may present a challenge.

Engineering may be a one-man-band department, for example. And it might be that no one else in the building can do even part of the job.

One solution is to look outside: Perhaps it might be possible to make advance arrangements with another station for mutual coverage in case the engineer is indisposed. Often, the engineers know one another anyway. And cooperation helps everyone.

Our hope is that you continue unaffected by the any virus. So then: Plan, Prevent, Prevail. You and everyone in your facility will benefit. - - - **The BDR**

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