

Background

The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported an outbreak of a highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) affecting birds in a number of countries in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa. The strain of H5N1 that re-emerged in 2003 in Asia is a slightly altered form of the 1997 virus. It has now spread to other parts of the world by migratory birds and possibly through trade in poultry. Some countries have reported only isolated cases in wild birds while other countries have had extensive outbreaks in poultry farms.

Avian influenza is a contagious viral infection that can affect all species of birds and occasionally causes disease in humans. The actual number of human cases around the world has been small relative to the number of outbreaks in birds. Although the H5N1 virus can cause severe and sometimes fatal infections in humans, there has been no evidence of effective human-to-human spread of H5N1 infection, and no evidence that a new influenza pandemic is starting. Nevertheless, companies and organizations are starting to develop contingency plans.

There have been three influenza pandemics in last century: in 1918, in 1957/1958 and again in 1968/1969. The outbreaks occurring in the fifties and sixties were caused by viruses containing a combination of genes from a human influenza virus and an avian influenza virus. A pandemic outbreak could affect workplaces, schools, hospitals, factories and other facilities. Closures could occur due to lack of staff. Normal health and other services may not be available for several weeks.

The purpose of the IFMA study is to see if organizations consider pandemic flu as a threat and what types of plans subsequently have been developed.

Results

1. What is your level of understanding of current avian H5N1 virus (bird flu) and its potential to turn into a pandemic flu outbreak?

- 43% Have a clear understanding of the issue
- 40% Somewhat aware of this issue
- 16% Have limited knowledge of the issue
- 1% Unaware of the issue

2. Does your organization's senior management consider a pandemic flu outbreak as a serious or probable threat to your business?

- 49% Yes
- 51% No

Note: Those who manage global facilities are more likely to consider a flu outbreak as a threat to business operations.

3. Which statement best describes your company's current response to pandemic flu?

- 7% Pandemic plans completed and implemented.
- 41% We are in progress of creating/updating our plan.
- 18% We feel we have addressed the issue in our business continuity plans. No additional action is required.
- 34% This type of planning has not been considered.

4. Do your plans address the impact of pandemic flu relative to:

- 91% Staffing
- 83% Facilities
- 67% Security
- 63% Customers/visitors
- 48% Vendors
- 43% Food service
- 13% Other – travel, patients, research animals, community, employees' families

5. In your planning, have you consulted with any external organizations such as government agencies?

- 60% Yes
- 40% No

6. Were any of your facilities, operations or employees impacted by the 2003-04 SARS outbreak?

- 12% Yes
- 88% No

Note: 45% of the Canadian respondents' operations or facilities were affected by SARS.

7. Does your organization either subsidize or promote flu shots to employees prior to or during flu season?

- 55% We subsidize the cost of flu shots
- 31% We encourage or promote employees to get a flu shot
- 15% We do not offer or promote flu shots
- 11% Other – offer free flu shots, government provides free flu shots, arrange for flu shots to be administered on-site

6. Has your organization changed its travel policy because of this issue?

- 8% Yes
- 92% No

8. Do you manage public access facilities (e.g. hospitals, schools, courthouses, airports or retail establishments)?

33% Yes
67% No

9. Do you manage facilities in more than one country?

23% Yes
77% No

10. In which country are you located?

8.0% Canada	0.4% Luxembourg
0.5% China	0.2% Mexico
0.2% Czech Republic	0.2% Singapore
0.2% Denmark	0.2% South Africa
0.2% Germany	0.2% Switzerland
1.4% Hong Kong	0.2% United Arab Emirates
0.6% India	1.4% United Kingdom
0.2% Ireland	86.0% United States
0.2% Italy	

Methodology

The data for this study was collected using a web-based questionnaire. An e-mail invitation was sent to 4,251 professional members of International Facility Management Association (IFMA) on April 12, 2006. The invitation included a link where respondents could answer the short survey. Of the 4,251 e-mails sent, 3,994 were successful in reaching the intended recipient. Members responded quickly; the majority of the responses were received within 48 hours of issuing the survey. A total of 596 surveys were deemed complete. The overall response rate was 15%.

The margin of error at the 95% confidence interval for these questions is between + 4 and + 5 percentage points. This means that for a given statistic, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 4% or 5% from the results that would have been obtained if a survey had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by this sample.