

Infectious Disease / Pandemic Policy

Purpose

Mobile County Commission (County) strives to provide a safe and healthy workplace for all employees. This Infectious Disease/Pandemic Policy outlines the County's overall response in the event of an Infectious Disease/Pandemic outbreak. It outlines specific steps the County will take to safeguard employees' health and well-being during an infectious disease/pandemic outbreak while ensuring the County's ability to maintain essential operations and continue providing essential services to the public. Also, it gives guidance on how the County intends to respond to specific operational and human resources issues in the event of an infectious disease/pandemic outbreak.

Definitions

Infectious diseases are illnesses caused by germs (such as bacteria, viruses, and fungi) that enter the body, multiply, and cause an infection.

- Some infectious diseases are contagious (or communicable), that is, spread from one person to another.
- Germs carried in the air, water, food, or soil can spread other infectious diseases. They can also be spread by vectors (like biting insects) or by animals.

Epidemic is a rise in the number of cases of a disease beyond what is normally expected in a geographical area.

Pandemic is a global outbreak of disease. Pandemics happen when a new virus emerges to infect people and can spread between people sustainably. Because there is little to no pre-existing immunity against the new virus, it spreads worldwide.

Emerging means infections that have increased recently or are threatening to increase soon. These infections could be

- completely new (like SARS) or (COVID-19).
- reappearing in an area (like dengue in south Florida).
- old infections that have become resistant to antibiotics (like staph and the deadly gram-negative infections that are cropping up in hospitals).

Essential personnel is those employees whose jobs are vitally important to the County's continued operation. For example, first-responders and those designated by department directors and approved by the county administrator.

Response Levels

The County recognizes three increasing levels of precautionary response to infectious diseases. **The County must approve a State of Emergency Health Declaration for Levels II and III to be activated.**

Level I

The World Health Organization (WHO) and/or the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has/have declared an epidemic or pandemic, but there is minimal effect locally. The County Administration will implement communications with employees concerning the infectious disease and take precautionary measures to mitigate the spread of the disease, such as:

- Recommend actions that employees can take to protect themselves outside the workplace and encourage workers to discuss their specific needs with a family physician or other appropriate health or wellness professional;
- Increase the cleaning and sanitizing of work and public access areas;
- Provide sanitizers and germ-filtering masks and gloves to employees and the public as deemed appropriate, if available; and
- Use thermal temperature scanners to identify potential infectious symptoms at security checkpoints for the public and employees.

Level II

At this level, the infectious disease has escalated as a contagion. The number of cases has increased statewide, and the governor has declared a state health emergency. The County, upon commission approval through a State of Emergency Health Declaration, will move to Level II of the Infectious Disease/Pandemic Policy.

Infection – Control Measures

The County will continue all Level I precautionary measures and take additional actions to minimize or eliminate public contact with County offices and personnel, such as:

- Keep open County offices except for non-essential offices or departments that directly interact with the public;
- Cancel or postpone meetings of more than 10 people;
- Temporarily assign some employees to other job duties and/or classifications;
- Designate essential and non-essential employees who may be required to work from home; and
- Pay essential employees whose work responsibilities require daily public contact one and a half (1.5) times their regular rate of pay.

Level III

At this level, the infectious disease has escalated to a serious health crisis. The County will take more drastic measures to combat the spread of infectious disease. These measures include the following:

- Temporarily relieve all non-essential employees of their work responsibilities and pay them their regular pay during this period. Employees will not report back to work until notified by the county administrator;
- Pay essential employees who are required to interact with the public or with other County employees to perform their job-related functions one and a half (1.5) times their regular rate of pay; and
- Pay essential employees who are required to perform their job-related functions from home and are not required to interact physically or directly with the public or other County employees at their regular rate of pay.

Only designated essential personnel will work during a Level III infectious disease outbreak unless otherwise notified. If essential personnel become ill and unavailable to work or unable to reach the employee's worksite due to conditions beyond the employee's control, the County will activate back-up arrangements. The County will train and equip designated personnel to fulfill the duties of unavailable essential employees. Also, the County will provide the necessary staff with the resources, including computers and cell phones, needed for employees to work remotely during emergencies.

The County strongly urges all employees to maintain up-to-date vaccinations and to obtain annual flu shots, if available, and not medically contraindicated.

General Provisions

Sick employees

If an employee contracts an infectious disease according to a physician's diagnosis or medical testing, or a physician has recommended the employee self-quarantine due to contagious symptoms or exposure to an infectious disease, the County will place the employee on administrative leave for up to 14 days at his or her regular rate of pay.

If a symptomatic employee comes to work, the County may require that the employee leave immediately and place that person on administrative leave for the remainder of that day and the following day to allow the employee to seek medical attention. Any additional days will be charged as sick leave, vacation leave, compensatory time, or approved leave without pay until the employee receives medical clearance to return to work. If the employee's physician diagnoses the employee with an infectious disease and directs the employee to self-quarantine, the County will place the employee on administrative leave for up to 14 days.

Unless otherwise notified, the County's usual attendance and leave policies will remain in place. Individuals who face particular challenges reporting to work during an infectious disease outbreak should take steps to develop necessary contingency plans. For example, employees might want to arrange for alternative sources of child care should schools close and/or speak with supervisors about the potential to work from home temporarily or on an alternative work schedule.

Quarantine

If the County determines that an employee may have potentially been exposed to an infectious disease, the county administrator or other designated person reserves the right to require the employee to leave the workplace. And, if so, the employee will be placed on administrative leave for up to 14 days and will receive their regular rate of pay.

Mandatory employee training

All employees are at risk of exposure to infectious diseases, both inside and outside the workplace; therefore, the County will require all employees to complete initial or refresher training as directed to become informed about what to do when an infectious disease/pandemic outbreak occurs.

Facilities maintenance

The County Facilities Department staff will coordinate closely with the County's custodial staff to maintain County facilities in a sanitary condition. The County strives to use the most current and valid equipment or cleaning methods to guard against the spread of infection in the workplace.

Family and medical leave

If applicable, the County will place any workers who fall ill with an infectious disease or must be absent from work to care for an infected family member on medical leave. The County requires such employees to notify Human Resources as soon as possible of the need for family and medical leave. The County allows employees to use accrued paid annual and sick leave concurrently with FMLA. After the employee exhausts all paid leave, the remainder of FMLA will be unpaid.

Teladoc

Teladoc provides a national network of U. S. board-certified doctors available 24/7/365 to resolve many medical issues. The use of this service is strongly encouraged during an infectious disease outbreak rather than risk infecting others in a medical facility waiting room. Teledoc can be contacted by phone at 1-(855)-477-4549 or video www.teladoc.com/alabama to support and advise employees.

Business Travel

The County will make all reasonable efforts to eliminate the need for travel by taking advantage of technology that allows electronic forms of communication. In the event of an infectious disease outbreak, travel on the County's behalf may be suspended or limited to a select group of essential personnel who have obtained required travel authorizations from the appropriate appointing authority.

Communications

Outside authorities: The County partners with local, state, and federal emergency-response and health agencies to ensure legal compliance with emergency-response protocols.

The County will notify employees of the closing and re-opening of County offices and facilities through the news media, the County's website and Facebook page, and other means.

The Mobile County Commission, at its discretion, will declare a change in the precautionary status, method of employee compensation, or an end to the state of emergency as it relates to the infectious disease/pandemic outbreak.