

# **Pandemic Flu, Social Distancing Measures, and Business Continuation at Longwood University**

## **April 2006**

*"Pandemic influenza is like hurricanes, tsunamis, and earthquakes: It will happen,"*  
*-Michael Osterholm, Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, University of Minnesota*

This is a discussion document, meant to stimulate Longwood University's planning and policymaking prior to the event of pandemic flu.

### **Background**

A risk of pandemic flu is the outcome of the development of a new flu strain. This risk depends on the new strain's virulence and its capability for sustained human-to-human transmission. Previous flu pandemics occurred in the U.S. in 1918, 1957 and 1968. Public health experts predict that a flu pandemic will occur again in the future.

When sustained human-to-human transmission of a pandemic flu strain first appears in the U.S., a vaccine will not be available and antiviral medications will be limited. Public health officials will first recommend personal hygiene, self-shielding and social distancing measures for susceptible populations. Voluntary recommendations will be issued far before any mandatory or quarantine actions.

**Self-shielding** is when people take action on their own to minimize their exposure to others. This is likely to occur to some degree even before recommendations from public health officials. People will cancel planned travel. Students are likely to skip classes or may even leave campus to return home. Employees may take leave and will ask to work from home. Meetings will be cancelled. Students will ask if they can continue their studies without attending class. Performances and athletic events will be sparsely attended. Ticket sales will fall.

**Social distancing measures** include canceling public events, suspending school and curtailing travel.

### **How Will Longwood University Respond?**

At an appropriate time, public health officials will recommend social distancing measures for populations that may include Longwood University's students and employees. However, decisions to cancel or suspend specific classes, research, events and administrative activities are likely to be at Longwood University's discretion. How will Longwood University respond?

#### *Longwood University's Objectives When Social Distancing is Recommended*

If public health officials urge social distancing measures while class is in session, Longwood University will have these objectives:

- Take measures to protect students, faculty and staff;
- Take social distancing steps that respond to public health recommendations;

- Decide which social distancing measures, policies, and operational changes make sense to implement at Longwood University;
- Change teaching activities so that the semester's courses can be taught and completed;
- Support laboratory research so that it will continue;
- Find ways to support and facilitate other teaching and research activities so that Longwood University's business can continue in this environment;
- Change employee work practices to allow social distancing and continuation of university operations.

### *Social Distancing Questions for Longwood University*

If public health officials recommend the implementation of social distancing measures while class is in session:

- What specific Longwood University teaching, research and service activities will be impacted? How will they be impacted?
- What specific social distancing measures would Longwood University implement in this scenario?
- Would we send students home? Would we cancel classes?
- Can we establish criteria now for canceling or suspending classes?
- Would we send non-essential staff home?
- Would we cancel performances and athletic events?
- What changes to instructional activities can be made to allow social distancing while successfully completing the semester?
- What policy, work practice and technological changes would Longwood University need to make in order to continue our teaching, research and service mission?
- What plans, policies and other changes can be made now to better prepare Longwood University for such a situation?

### *Business Continuation Questions for Longwood University*

*(COOP- Continuity of Operations Plan)*

In the event of pandemic flu, continuations of Longwood University's teaching, research and service activities will be a foremost goal of our planning and policymaking. It is likely that the following issues will need to be addressed:

- How will the institution operate with a third of its students, faculty, and staff ill?
- How will the institution operate with up to half of its staff at home with sick family members?
- In this situation, can the institution house a third of its residential student populations while they are ill and convalescing? If so, how can this be done?
- What will happen with students in remote/overseas programs?
- Will Longwood University open for business if international travel restrictions start before a session?
- If the start of a session is delayed, how will this affect tuition and cash flow?
- Could cash flow issues impact pay to faculty and staff?
- What plans, policies and other changes can be made now to better enable Longwood University to continue our teaching, research and service activities in such a situation?