

Maintaining Essential Services in Cities While Public Health Social Measures are in Place

Many cities have already or will soon implement public health social measures to slow transmission of COVID-19. Maintaining essential services in the face of rapid COVID-19 spread and public health social measures will require continuity management. To aid in rapid planning and response for COVID-19, governments, businesses and other non-government organizations should adapt and use existing “continuity of operations” or continuity management plans developed for similar emergencies, such as pandemic influenza. These may be available locally or nationally, or developed using guides from national emergency management agencies, the World Health Organization (see source at the end of this guide) and other international organizations.

Key messages:

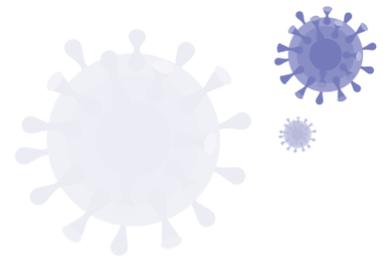
- Widespread illness from COVID-19 and non-pharmaceutical interventions implemented to control it can interrupt the delivery of essential services needed for health and wellbeing
- Government and essential services providers should plan and prepare now to maintain essential services even as physical distancing and other public health social measures are active
- Keys to success include timely and adaptive implementation, clear communication, and monitoring reach of essential services, especially to vulnerable populations

This guide will help you to:

- Identify essential services in your city
- Plan and act to continue essential government functions
- Help all sectors plan and act to ensure continuity of operations for essential services

Who will maintain essential services?

The mayor and the municipal leadership team will make decisions and communicate about what services are essential. Municipal leadership will consult with, direct, support and coordinate across levels of government, agencies, sectors, businesses and other organizations on actions needed to maintain essential services in the city.



What are essential services?

Essential services include government and private sector services and functions that are absolutely necessary for health, welfare and public safety, even while physical distancing and other public health social measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 restrict non-essential activities and services. Without essential services, more illness, economic deprivation, social isolation and disorder would likely result.

Each city will have to determine what services are essential and which types of workers are needed to maintain these services. The examples below will apply to most cities:

- Government executive, policymaking, legal and finance functions that support essential services
- Healthcare and emergency medical services
- Public safety, including fire protection and law enforcement
- Clean water, wastewater treatment and solid waste management
- Energy, including electric power, heating, cooking and vehicle fuels
- Communications, including phone and internet
- Provision of food, medical supplies and other essential goods
- Transportation, including public transit, roads and traffic safety
- Banking, payroll, and benefits distribution

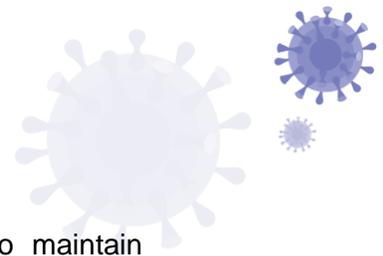
Non-essential services can be suspended to support physical distancing and slow community transmission of COVID-19 in a city without endangering health, welfare and public safety. Some examples are:

- Tourism
- Cultural, entertainment, and sporting events
- Libraries and museums
- Retail stores providing non-essential goods
- Barbershops, salons, gyms and spas

For some services and activities, such as religious observances, whether or not they are considered essential is highly dependent on local context and traditions. Consultation with community and institutional leaders is especially important for determining whether such activities can be suspended and, if not, how they might occur with physical distancing measures in place.

Continuity Management for Maintaining Essential Services

Continuity management involves planning, preparation, and adaptive implementation of responses to maintain operations of governments, agencies, businesses and other



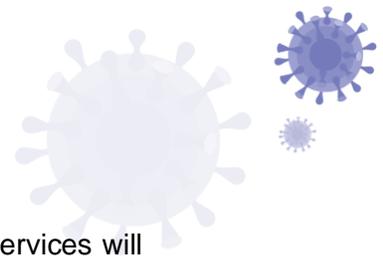
organizations during an emergency. Continuity management is needed to maintain operations supporting essential services that could be disrupted or need to be modified during the COVID-19 pandemic because of:

- The potential for widespread absence among essential personnel, including government and business leaders, who become ill or need to care for sick household members;
- Increased demand for some essential services;
- Mandated public health social measures requiring operational changes in how services and goods are delivered, while maintaining physical distancing and preventing transmission among workers and others;
- Transportation disruptions for essential employees and deliveries; and
- Indirect impacts on essential services, including interruptions in supporting services and goods, such as electricity or vehicle fuel.

Planning and Preparing for Maintaining Essential Services in Your City During COVID-19 Transmission

Key planning and preparation steps

- Convene and direct the municipal leadership team to:
 - Develop government continuity plan (or review an existing plan) that designates order of succession and delegation of authority should key leaders become unable to serve.
 - In consultation with key non-governmental sectors and civil society organizations, identify essential services, with special consideration for vulnerable populations.
 - Identify non-essential services that can be suspended or adapted to make them safer.
 - Plan for redeployment of resources and people to support essential city services.
 - Consult with public health experts to obtain realistic local scenarios of the anticipated peak severity, duration and potential recurrent waves of rapid local transmission of COVID-19. These scenarios will inform criteria for implementing NPIs and suspending non-essential services, and for easing NPIs and resuming non-essential services, guiding planning and preparedness steps for government agencies and non-governmental entities. Tools to support creating these scenarios are available on the [Partnership for Healthy Cities COVID-19 Resource Center](#).
- Communicate to the public and all stakeholders the rationale for and list of essential and non-essential services and businesses, criteria for initiating public health social

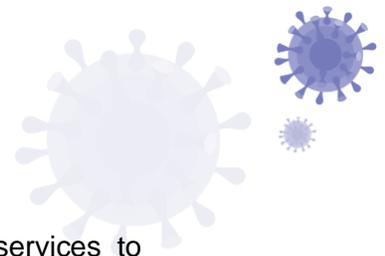


measures and suspending non-essential services and how essential services will be maintained.

- Emphasize the following planning and preparation steps below for governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations:
 - Review or prepare continuity of operations plans and prepare to implement them.
 - Estimate workforce disruption, considering employee illness, quarantine and caring for sick household members, based on local scenarios.
 - Identify operational changes to maintain essential operations with reduced staff in the same space: shift changes, alternative work sites and remote work.
 - Identify services and equipment needed to support remote work.
 - Determine minimal staffing, including key leadership and other specialized personnel needed to maintain operations.
 - Consider accommodations necessary for essential personnel to continue to serve effectively, such as childcare services, psychosocial support, access to medications, personal protective equipment, transport, and other needs. Identify and access services being provided by the city and non-governmental organizations.
 - Train staff and prepare just-in-time training materials in the following areas:
 - The organization’s plan for continuing operations;
 - Individual roles in the plan and cross-training backup personnel; and
 - Personal measures to reduce transmission, including hand hygiene, physical distancing, staying home if sick or if household member is sick.
 - Determine sources of substitute employees including at least two replacements for key personnel.
 - Determine outside suppliers and services needed to maintain operations. Contact them to inform of your needs, assess and plan for possible disruption. If possible, begin to build stocks of essential supplies, parts and equipment.
 - Identify and plan for security risks to operations, critical facilities, records, essential goods stores that could be subject to physical or cyber attacks.
 - Develop policies and plans for reopening businesses and resuming non-essential services.

Key implementation steps

- Implement [public health social measures](#) based on local epidemiology, as soon as community transmission is identified or suspected.



- Order agencies, organizations and businesses providing essential services to implement the continuity of operations plans, including changes needed for physical distancing.
- Order suspension of non-essential services and mitigate community and societal impacts through the use of counter-measures.
- Provide timely and broad communication before NPIs are implemented to allow for orderly closing of non-essential businesses and implementation of continuity management plans.
- Communicate with the public throughout the suspension of non-essential services.
- Monitor and adapt implementation based on:
 - Compliance with orders;
 - Population access and gaps in essential services, especially for vulnerable populations; and
 - Local epidemiology and health system capacity.

SOURCES:

This document is adapted for use by the Partnership for Healthy Cities program from: USAID/PAHO, *Leadership During A Pandemic: What Your Municipality Can Do. Tool 16: Maintaining Essential Services.*

Additional sources:

World Health Organization. Whole-Of-Society Pandemic Readiness. WHO guidelines for pandemic preparedness and response in the non- health sector (Geneva, July 2009)

https://www.who.int/influenza/preparedness/pandemic/2009-0808_wos_pandemic_readiness_final.pdf