



COVID-19
APRIL 2020

Priority Considerations and Actions to Lead Your City Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

When disasters of any kind strike, the ability of a city to respond well is often linked to two factors: (1) the presence of strong leadership and (2) the level of coordination among the various responding sectors. The same is true in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether it is the mayor, a city leadership team, or the head of a disaster response team, it is important to clearly identify who is in charge and who has the authority to allocate resources and make policy decisions that will affect the lives of the people in your city.

Most countries have national level plans for pandemics in place, but few have city level plans. Because COVID-19 has the potential to rapidly spread via community transmission, cities may need to activate plans with limited national or regional direction. This checklist is designed to provide you with the guidance and resources to build a multisector city COVID-19 plan. *It is very important that city plans reflect national level planning and that all city response activities are consistent with the national strategic objectives, laws, and policies.* If you do not already have a copy of your country's National Pandemic Response Plan, contact your Ministry of Health or look for it on their website. Your country may also have an Emergency Communications Plan that you should follow.

Key messages:

- This checklist includes a set of key objectives that correspond to the preparedness and response stages of COVID-19.
- These objectives and the actions taken to achieve them will lessen the impact of COVID on your city.

This guide will help you to:

- Identify key objectives for COVID-19 pandemic preparedness and response.
- Use this checklist to best manage the COVID-19 pandemic at a city level and to reduce deaths.

Who will implement priority actions to lead your city through the COVID-19 Pandemic?

- The mayor
- Members of the city leadership team
- Members of the multisector disaster response team



PREPAREDNESS: WHAT YOU CAN DO BEFORE COVID-19 TRANSMISSION IN YOUR CITY

1. Review your country's national plan for pandemic preparedness and response to understand roles and responsibilities of key government authorities at the national level.
2. Review your city's plan for epidemic preparedness and response and adapt the plan to globally derived knowledge and scientific evidence about COVID-19.
3. Review any existing emergency communications plans and prepare to disseminate information to the local community. The World Health Organization's offers regularly updated [public guidance](#).

Organize a Disaster Response Team and Initiate Planning

1. Organize a multisector disaster response team, including representatives from each of the following sectors:
 - a. Executive leadership: mayor or mayor's designee
 - b. Members of any pre-existing disaster committee
 - c. Public safety and security
 - d. Public health and medical services
 - e. Food security
 - f. Business and commerce
 - g. Finance
 - h. Logistics and transportation
 - i. Communications spokesperson(s)
 - j. Telecommunications, information technology and informatics
2. Immediate actions for multisector disaster response team:
 - a. Review your country's national pandemic plan and COVID-19 plan, if available
 - b. Review national and/or city general disaster plans
 - c. Define roles and responsibilities of each representative of the multisector disaster response team
 - d. Identify key personnel responsible for each of the technical areas or sectors (e.g. health, security)
 - e. Develop concrete operational plans (i.e., continuity of government and continuity of operations plans) for each technical area (e.g. maintenance of essential services)
 - f. Implement preparedness programs for infection control and public health social measures, including physical distancing policies
 - g. Raise community awareness about infection control and social distancing measures



- h. Provide emergency COVID-19 epidemic training to the representatives of each of your city's sectors.

Determine Who Will Be Most at Risk From COVID-19

1. Identify and map vulnerable populations and at-risk groups within the city. For COVID, the vulnerable include older adults, adults with co-morbid conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and chronic cardiovascular and lung disease, and those with chronically or acutely suppressed immune systems. Vulnerable populations also include people without access to routine or emergency healthcare, informal workers, incarcerated and institutionalized children and adults, and low-income and socially marginalized populations.
2. Review your city's budget to evaluate what fiscal resources are available to support COVID response.
3. Conduct an inventory of your city's essential resources, including but not limited to:
 - a. Food stocks
 - b. Medical resources, such as:
 - i. Trained personnel
 - ii. Personal protective equipment
 - iii. Ventilators
 - iv. Medications for non-pandemic related illnesses
 - v. Hospital beds and intensive care beds
 - vi. Outpatient facilities
 - vii. Locations where makeshift hospitals could be set up
 - viii. Morgue capacity and alternatives for dead bodies
 - c. Drinking water, water purification supplies and availability of water for handwashing
 - d. Fuel for vehicles, generators, heating and cooling, and other types of equipment
 - e. Communications needs, such as public information materials and channels, for rapid information dissemination including mass media and social media platforms
4. Identify which resources can be produced locally and which have to be imported domestically or internationally.
5. Develop a plan for resupply of essential resources, taking into consideration likely worker absenteeism and interruptions in supply chains.
6. Develop plan to mobilize resources and distribution to priority areas and/or vulnerable populations.
7. Assess city's food stocks and fill existing gaps through collection and storage of emergency food rations.



8. Clearly communicate steps households can take to maintain their access to food and other essential commodities.
9. For commodities that must be purchased or routinely replenished, develop and seek approval for an emergency budget allocation to cover their costs.

Prepare for the Expected Health Impact

1. Check national and international information sources for up-to-date information.
2. Ensure that all responders receive training on case definitions and clinical guidance for management of COVID-19 cases.
3. Protect all responders by providing necessary PPE, and train them on their proper use.
4. Create a plan to maintain essential health services.
5. Standardize data collection and COVID case reporting. The World Health Organization designed this [Case Report Form](#).
6. Collect, analyze and report testing, morbidity and mortality data daily and evaluate its potential impact on access to healthcare for both pandemic and non-pandemic illnesses. Refer to the [World Health Organization's surveillance case definitions](#) for severe acute respiratory infections and [global surveillance for COVID infection](#).
7. Facilitate two-way communications with your community to monitor the knowledge of COVID-19 and rapidly address rumors and misinformation.

Implement Your COVID-19 Response Plans

Once you detect local transmission of COVID-19 in your city (cases with the source of infection identified as within your city), you and your disaster response team will need to focus on accomplishing the following goals simultaneously.

Implement Plans: Immediate Actions

1. Open an emergency operations center and implement an incident command structure.
2. Convene your incident command team.
3. Activate all personnel with sector responsibilities.
4. Ensure a data driven response – establish a dashboard of key indicators to allow an overview of the response.



Limit the Spread of COVID-19

1. Review guidance: *Nonpharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs) in Cities*
2. Determine which NPIs you will need to implement in your city *and adapt to your local context.*
3. Provide information to the public to explain why social distancing is needed and include instructions on how the public can practice social distancing.
4. Enact any legislation or policies necessary to prevent public gatherings and events, to close schools, and, if needed, to enforce isolation and quarantine.
5. Ensure that household isolation and quarantine measures are carried out.
6. Plan how to distribute food and other goods directly to vulnerable families and individuals

Keep the Government Running

The COVID-19 pandemic could have a devastating impact on your city's workforce. It will affect the workers who need to continue providing essential services to the people of your city, including those who (1) work in sanitation and waste disposal, (2) maintain the potable water supply for your city, (3) maintain your gas and electric services, (4) transport goods, (5) provide policing and security services. Many will be sick, unable to go to work due to disruptions in transportation systems or unwilling to go to work due to fear of contracting the disease.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hits, more people will need healthcare and emergency services, yet fewer healthcare and emergency personnel will be available to take care of them. At the peak of the pandemic, you may experience up to 40% of all workers unable or unwilling to work. Your challenge will be to identify those services that must be continued, even at the height of the pandemic.

Keep Government Running: Immediate Actions

1. Ensure that basic services and goods will continue to be provided to people in your city.
2. Determine your city's need for additional staff to maintain essential services. If you will use volunteers, provide them with COVID-19 emergency training.
3. Identify vulnerabilities in critical goods and services and develop a plan to address these gaps.

Communicate with the Public

It is crucial to develop a plan for how you will get life-saving information to households during the COVID-19 pandemic. To keep the population of your city calm and engaged, you will need to understand the specific challenges that your population faced prior to the



pandemic and how these will likely intensify during the pandemic. This will help inform how to best communicate with residents during a time of crisis.

When people are afraid of becoming sick, lack their basic needs, and feel a sense of suffering and despair, they may respond in ways that can cause more panic and even more deaths. Preventing public panic will require anticipating the negative behaviors that some residents may demonstrate, such as panic buying, stealing, or looting. To help keep people of your city calm, they will need to know that you can ensure their physical safety and that you can protect the key resources and services they need.

Communication is key. You can help build trust by practicing the principles of risk communication. For example, provide facts as they are known as well as admit what you don't know yet. Be empathic about people's concerns and how you will continue to keep people informed. (See our guidance on risk communication). And engage trusted community groups like faith leaders in the response. A calm and cooperative public is more likely to comply with city authorities' guidance and to adopt the actions and behaviors they should be taking to protect themselves and their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Communicate with the Public: Actions to Reduce Infections and to Prevent Panic

1. Review any existing crisis and emergency risk communications tools and adapt for COVID-19.
2. Create and plan the dissemination of key messages to the public. These messages will include up-to-date, accurate information about how people can protect themselves, the status of food supplies, and how they can secure access to health care services.
3. Include health messages offering guidance as to what people should do if they get sick and need care.
4. Be forthcoming about possibilities of interruptions in supply chains, but let people know these are likely to be temporary and that essential goods and resources are protected.
5. Effective messages disseminated among the population will help to prevent looting and other acts of hostility or violence.
6. Effective messages to build a sense of community and social cohesion – encouraging the whole population to adhere to physical distancing measures to protect the most vulnerable
7. Prepare the public to seek and receive frequent updates by explaining that the pandemic is evolving, and more is being learned every day.



Help People Meet Their Food and Nutrition Needs

1. If food supplies are limited in the city:
 - a. Communicate to subnational and national governments and key organizations in the area your need for assistance.
 - b. Engage local food producing and processing industries.
 - c. Restrict the export of locally produced food necessary to feed the people in the city.
2. For markets that remain open, regularly disinfect markets and reduce crowding by extending hours, limiting the number of people who may enter at once, and/or enforcing physical distancing.
3. Provide transportation support that allows producers to get products to market or community food warehouses.
4. Implement price freezes on staple and nutritious food items to enable basic food access for all.
5. Distribute emergency food rations if the pandemic endangers people's abilities to obtain enough food to meet their daily needs.
 - a. Prioritize who will receive food transfers based on your updated assessment.
 - b. Establish decentralized drop off points or home deliveries that adhere to social distancing measures.
6. Disseminate critical messages that will help protect food security and livelihoods.

Allocate Scarce Resources

1. Develop policies and a process to prioritize the distribution of essential goods and services across all sectors.
2. Task your health sector with clinical triage and establish a plan for continued access to healthcare services at the family and community level.
3. Regularly monitor vulnerable communities, families and individuals.
4. Communicate with local business leaders and networks of families (without congregating them) to determine which business activities generate the goods and services needed by others, and to determine who can loan cash, fuel and other goods.

SOURCE(S)

This document is adapted for use by the Partnership for Healthy Cities program from: USAID/PAHO: *Leadership During A Pandemic: What Your City Can Do. Tool 1: Priority Actions to Lead Your City Through a Pandemic.*