Business Continuity Planning

A business continuity plan will help you act quickly during an emergency and should help your pharmacy recover quickly as well. The business continuity plan should describe how the pharmacy intends to maintain its critical operations and minimize the impact of a pandemic or other emergency. The plan is about minimizing risk, and should include necessary resources, key contact lists and procedures that staff should follow.

A business continuity plan will help to set expectations for all staff, as when possible, pharmacies should try to maintain business as usual and the supply of medication for patients with chronic conditions.

Realizing that you may not be able to do everything yourself, remember to think outside the box when writing your plan. Is there anything that can be done in collaboration with other local business owners (not necessarily other pharmacies)?

The following checklist is adapted from the document "Service Continuity Planning for Pandemic Influenza" used by pharmacies in England.

Checklist for pharmacy owners/managers (hyperlink to checklist below)

Sample Checklist for Business Continuity Planning
(Adapted from the document "Service Continuity Planning for Pandemic Influenza" used by pharmacies in England).

	Not started	In progress	Completed
Overview			
Does your pharmacy have a general business continuity plan?			
Have you identified the critical resources needed to run your business (stock, personnel, equipment, utilities, etc)			
Have you assessed the impact of losing any of the key resources?			
How fluid is your cash flow? Will you need to consider talking to your bank manager at an early stage if, for example, there is a delay in prescription payments?			
Check your business insurance. Does it cover liability for spread of disease among staff?			
Can you assure the safety of staff and premises if law and order become and issue?			
General			
Involve all staff in drafting the emergency service continuity plan			
Identify methods of gathering reliable information on current pandemic status (i.e., World Health Organization, MOHLTC Emergency Management Unit, Health Canada)			
Ensure the plan states the triggers for activation and cessation, and that all staff are aware of when it will start and when normal business will resume			
Make the plan easily accessible to staff			
Find out about local pandemic plans (local Public Health Unit, MOHLTC)			
Activities			
Identify critical activities that need to continue during an emergency and rank in order of importance			
Go through your standard operating procedures (SOP) and decide what may need to change during an emergency.			
Plan to restrict the number of non-essential face-to-face meetings with others (i.e., training programs, business meetings, etc.)			
Identify methods of infection control in the pharmacy (i.e., extra surface cleaning, cough etiquette, social distancing). Pharmacists and their staff will also play a vital role in providing messages of cough etiquette and hand-washing to the public			
Purchase contingency supplies for staff (i.e., hand-sanitizers, extra paper towels, masks, tissues, bottled water)			
Review and service air conditioning units to ensure premises are well ventilated.			
Staff			
Identify minimum staffing levels needed to continue safe operation (i.e., # of prescriptions that can be dispensed and staff security)			
Consider keeping details of staff who may be able to help out in an emergency (i.e., former employees, recently retired pharmacists, those on family leave, etc.). Determine what training they need.			

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Ensure staff contact list is up-to-date. Include details of after-hours numbers, cell phones and emergency contact information for each. Set up a phone tree, where you call two people, they each call two other people etc.			
Ensure information for locums is up-to-date in case you need to use relief/agency staff			
For larger companies, make sure staff are confident to work in other locations			
Identify a course of action to be taken if staff levels fall below the minimum			
Identify key roles and tasks, and allocate staff to these			
Cross train staff where possible, and avoid situations where only one person is trained to carry out a task.			
Consider flexible working – can any tasks be done by staff at home (i.e., end of month procedures, paperwork, ordering, etc.)			
Consider the ability to work in shifts – can repeat prescriptions or compliance packaging be prepared after-hours?			
Are there arrangements for accessing keys and security codes if usual staff are all absent?			
Establish emergency-related human resources policies (for example, cancellation of annual leave, absence arrangements, quarantine periods, sick pay, bonus pay, etc.)			
Establish policies for managing illness. Make sure staff are told to stay away from work if displaying symptoms of flu and are aware when they are no longer infectious (MOHLTC will provide advice on such issues).			
Consider organizing car pooling for staff, perhaps with other local businesses in case public transport is affected or fuel is rationed.			
Suppliers			
Review your supply chain arrangements. Consider multiple suppliers for key products			
Identify vital business consumables (till rolls, fax paper, etc.) and consider keeping extra supplies in stock.			
Keep supplier contact details accessible and updated and ensure supplier changes are documented.			
Identify ways of preventing or dealing with stock shortages (i.e., rationing of OTC remedies to prevent panic buying, maximum 30 days' supply of medication).			
Ask wholesalers and suppliers whether they have robust business continuity plans in place to maintain the supply chain.			
Financials			
Assess likely financial impact and revise business forecasts. Contact creditors at an early stage if necessary.			
Consider changing your business models. Would customers value medication deliveries so they can avoid leaving home? Can you maintain supplies of compliance packaging to LTC homes?			
Consider the change in the level demand of products (i.e., hygiene supplies and OTC medicines are likely to be in demand as well as goods that people would normally purchase in a supermarket).			
Will you have access to extra finance if needed to purchase additional supplies or if shortages increase market value of goods?			
Can you continue to pay staff and essential suppliers?			

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Communications			
Ensure that the College has up-to-date contact information for the pharmacy, including which pharmacists practice at that location.			
Consider the primary method of communication with staff, patients, physicians, etc. Will you need extra phone lines or mobile numbers?			
Establish a SOP so that information from the MOHLTC (found on both the OPA and OCP websites) and others is disseminated quickly.			
Ensure the SOP specifies methods of contacting staff who are off work through illness, bereavement, family obligations, etc.			
Establish plans to communicate with customers, especially if opening hours change.			
Consider recorded messages to deal with common queries and how provincial messages such as "remain at home if you are symptomatic to limit infection spread" can be supported.			
Communicate changes in service, for example, cessation of any non-essential services.			
Consider using technology such as text messaging, email or websites to communicate with staff and customers.			
Security			
Can you secure your pharmacy if it needs to close for a long period?			
If you use a security company (i.e., an alarm system linked to a company) will the supplier be able to fulfil its contract?			
Ensure key holder details are up-to-date.			
Ensure your plan contains details of how you will assure safety and security of staff and customers.			