

How Ready Are You in the Event of a Major Epidemic?

Facing challenges in the health care industry are not new. However, how we confront these challenges in a way that minimizes risk and does not compromise patient safety requires planning and ability to control. For example, the current challenge that is on top of everyone's minds across the globe is the spread of Coronavirus, or COVID-19. We have confronted threats like this before – the communicable disease outbreaks such as the 2009–2010 H1N1 (swine flu) pandemic, 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and 2012 Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV), are a few that impacted the global health care arena just in the last decade. What is new is the rapid pace in which these communicable diseases are spreading across international borders, especially given how globally dependent we are. This clearly results in the need to anticipate emergency situations that may be compounded by people who are infectious, or infections, themselves.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has highlighted the importance of identifying communicable disease outbreaks early to limit and control the transmission, mortality, and potential negative impact. Joint Commission International (JCI) Facility Management and Safety (FMS) and Prevention and Control of Infections (PCI) standards explicitly require health care organizations to develop, implement, and test an emergency preparedness program to respond to the presentation of global communicable diseases. However, the absence of emergency preparedness program or program not tested annually to ensure proper response when an actual event occurs, was found to be the top 4th PCI finding, from the analysis of 2017-2019 JCI data.

A health care organization's ability to deliver care, treatment, and services is threatened when the organization is ill-prepared to respond to a real or potential epidemic. Recognizing these epidemics likely require expanded or extended care capabilities over a prolonged period is a very important factor in preparing the response and managing the spread of infections. Although there is no way to predict when and where an emergency might occur, there are ways of preparing for these contingencies, through *Recognition, Response, Containment* and *Communication*. It is important for a health care organization to plan how to prevent the introduction of the infection into the organization, how to quickly recognize who is infected, and/or how to contain the risk or spread of the infection.,

JCI is hosting a special feature webinar to discuss further on this topic titled: "Global communicable diseases – Are you ready?" on March 25, 2020. Registration for this webinar will be available soon.