



HONG KONG MONETARY AUTHORITY
香港金融管理局

Circulars

16 Jun 2009

Preparedness for Human Swine Influenza Pandemic in Hong Kong

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16 June 2009

The Chief Executive
All Authorized Institutions

Dear Sir/Madam,

Preparedness for Human Swine Influenza Pandemic in Hong Kong

I am writing to draw your attention to the recent escalation of the pandemic alert level from Phase 5 to 6 by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and remind authorized institutions (AIs) to step up their preparedness for a human swine influenza pandemic.

In the light of WHO's decision to escalate the pandemic alert to Phase 6 level, AIs are reminded to put in place immediately all necessary precautionary and contingency measures for the "Serious Response Level" and consider invoking the relevant measures for the "Emergency Response Level"¹. A multi-disciplinary pandemic contingency team with sufficient authority and representatives from all key operational areas of your institution should be formed to monitor, and ensure completion of, the implementation of these measures. These should, among others, include:

- a. Ascertaining the following precautionary measures and responses are put in place:
 - i. a clear command, control and communication structure for crisis management is established for effective monitoring of the latest developments of the pandemic and managing any possible incidents;
 - ii. a monitoring mechanism is implemented to track any abnormal sickness and suspected infection of employees and to keep the HKMA apprised immediately of the latest situation;
 - iii. a communication plan, including guidelines for media handling, pre-arrangements of official spokespersons, sample press releases and/or frequently asked questions for communicating with key external parties (e.g., customers, counterparties, the media and other stakeholders) for different possible scenarios is established;
 - iv. computer systems have adequate capacity to cater for potential upsurge in transaction volume, particularly the on-line channels;

- b. Reviewing the readiness of the following emergency responses and contingency measures to ensure that they are ready for activation if needed:
- i. sufficient equipment and devices are in place to support the activation of "work from home" and/or "split operations" strategies;
 - ii. the bare minimum services (e.g. Internet banking, phone banking, ATM services, payment-related services, access to safe-deposit boxes under special requests) are determined in advance and the contingency arrangements are planned accordingly;
 - iii. detailed contingency plans are in place for branch closure in case of need, due to healthcare concerns (e.g. where there are suspected infection by staff working at a branch), including how to communicate with customers and to address the possible impact on customers.

Als should refer to the guidelines issued by the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health² from time to time, and the guidance set out in the relevant circulars and guidelines³ issued by the HKMA when implementing their emergency response and contingency measures for the pandemic. Given the increased level of threats of a widespread of human swine influenza in Hong Kong, Als should remain vigilant and continue to review the adequacy of their emergency preparedness.

The HKMA will continue to monitor the development and issue further guidance to Als where necessary.

Yours faithfully,

Nelson Man
Executive Director
(Banking Supervision)

¹ The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSARG) has developed the Framework of Government's Preparedness Plan for Influenza Pandemic, which includes a three-level response system (Alert Response Level, Serious Response Level and Emergency Response Level) based on different risk-graded epidemiological scenarios. The HKSARG has escalated the response level from "serious" to "emergency" on 1 May 2009.

² See: http://www.chp.gov.hk/view_content.asp?lang=en&info_id=14843

³ Including circulars on "Business continuity planning considerations relating to SARS" (2003), "Preparedness for Influenza Pandemic in Hong Kong" (2005), "Examinations on Preparedness for Influenza Pandemic" (2006), as well as the Supervisory Policy Manuals modules on "Business Continuity Planning" (2002).

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