

Leave - Pandemic Absence Policy

In the case of a pandemic being declared, the following policy shall be followed regarding staff absences.

A. Background

Human pandemic influenza occurs three to four times a century and can take place in any season, not just winter. Pandemic influenza results from the emergence of a new human influenza strain to which no human immunity exists. This new human pandemic strain can arise from either avian influenza strains or from influenza viruses infecting swine and potentially other mammalian species. It is usually associated with a higher severity of illness and, consequently, a higher risk of death. All age groups may be at risk, and experts predict an infection rate of 25-50% of the population, depending on the severity of the strain. Since the virus strain cannot be accurately predicted, a vaccine against pandemic flu may not be available until several months after the pandemic begins. A major factor in protecting populations will be the time from emergence of a new strain to the development and manufacture of vaccine. It is hypothesized that use of anti-virals may control the progression of a pandemic following its emergence, so adequate supplies of anti-virals are important. At all phases of a pandemic outbreak, but especially during the period when vaccine is unavailable, infection control is critical. [from **The World Medical Association Statement on Avian and Pandemic Influenza**].

In the event that a pandemic is declared, we can expect a pandemic wave to last 6-10 weeks. An individual can be sick from 5-8 days.

B. Philosophy

We want to maintain and sustain the health of our staff physically, emotionally and spiritually. The following policies are being put in place to provide financially for staff if they are sick, and to encourage them to stay home when they are sick to stem the spread of transmission.

In the event of a flu pandemic, the Church will be looked to for a response, and as a model, of how to respond to a major emergency. This policy is intended to provide for adequate leave for staff to meet their needs, and to ensure that a flexible workforce is available to be the Church in the event of a pandemic.

C. General Guidelines

1. On the basis of the WHO indicators, the general secretary will declare when a pandemic is in effect and when it has subsided.
2. All international and interprovincial travel will be suspended until reviewed by the executive staff.
3. All supervisors will consider possible alternative work arrangements in the light of operational needs (see the existing policies listed under the Family Enhancement Policy, including flexible work schedules, telecommuting and compensatory time off under the extensive travel policy). Staff are encouraged to work from home as is possible.

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4. If an employee must be on site to work (for example, maintaining the Archives), consideration will also be given to assign and reassign duties to various staff and to provide opportunities to do professional development at home to maintain continuity in employment.

5. All staff are reminded to take advantage of any health and counseling services provided by their benefits plans during times of crisis.

Sick Leave

1. In the case of absence due to illness, staff will use their existing sick leave credits and report their absences according to the policy.

2. During a declared pandemic year, eight additional working days (7.5 hours per day x that person's FTE) of unpaid leave will be added to each person's sick leave bank. An additional eight days of unpaid leave will also be available to staff at the same rate for family care emergencies.

3. Staff who are sick and report to work will be sent home, and their sick credits will be applied to the absence.

4. Staff will not be required to produce a Doctor's note for an illness over five working days, but will be if the time is over eight working days (this does not include weekends).

5. Staff may be required to use sick leave in the event of a main office closure.

Vacation Leave

1. When a staff person needs leave time due to illness, they will normally apply leave credits in the following manner: Sick leave credits, overtime or flextime hours, vacation leave, unpaid leave.

2. Staff may apply any approved overtime or vacation time to their absences, but are not required to do so. If they do not wish to apply overtime or vacation time to their absence and they have no more sick leave credits they may make an unpaid leave request.

Compassionate Leave

Compassionate leave to attend funerals which do not meet the Leave – Bereavement and Compassionate policy guidelines will be unpaid leave days.