

OPINION

Ebel: Take steps to prepare as coronavirus spreads

Joe Ebel, Guest Columnist Published 8:02 a.m. ET March 8, 2020

It appears more and more likely that the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak will become a world-wide pandemic. CDC officials recently stated that it is no longer a question of "if" but "when" the new [coronavirus will spread in the United States](https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/health/2020/03/05/coronavirus-us-cases-symptoms-travel-deaths-prepare/4904568002/) (<https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/health/2020/03/05/coronavirus-us-cases-symptoms-travel-deaths-prepare/4904568002/>).

The general public are unlikely to be exposed to this virus at this time, but that will likely change, and now is the time to take steps to prepare for the impact of a pandemic.

Businesses, schools, healthcare providers, government agencies, and non-profits, should all be reviewing, or creating, their Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) and Continuity of Government (COG) plans. Reduced staffing levels can have a major impact on workplaces due to workers that are sick or deceased, as well as those who are quarantined because they have been exposed to an infected person, are home caring for a sick family member, are unable to arrange childcare if schools are closed, are avoiding crowded areas, or are volunteering as part of the emergency response.

How prepared states are for an epidemic

Trust for America's Health ranked states on their preparedness to protect the public's health during an emergency.

Well prepared Moderately Least prepared



SOURCE Trust for America's Health's 2020 Ready or Not survey

Questions to consider when reviewing your COOP include:

- What are the core staff functions and skill sets that are needed to keep the agency operating?
- Can staff that are healthy, but unable to come to work, provide work functions from home and do you have the technology in place to facilitate remote working?
- Are there trained back-ups available with the skills or certifications to fill in for key positions?
- Are there other resources, like retirees, volunteers, temp workers, that could be called on if needed?
- Can face-to-face interactions be reduced by transitioning to web, telephone, or email options?
- What if the leadership and key decision makers are incapacitated?
- Have the staff been trained on the COOP and know their roles?

U.S. disaster responses (Photo: USA TODAY)

This is also a good time for families to make their own plans. There are great tips available at www.ready.gov.

Things to consider include:

- What if [schools are cancelled for an extended time](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2020/03/08/coronavirus-schools-public-fear-cleaning-health-crisis/4957448002/) ([/story/news/education/2020/03/08/coronavirus-schools-public-fear-cleaning-health-crisis/4957448002/](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2020/03/08/coronavirus-schools-public-fear-cleaning-health-crisis/4957448002/))?
- Do you have enough non-perishable food, baby supplies and medicine to last for a week or more if you are too sick to go out or are quarantined at home?
- Will you employer consider allowing you to work from home in an emergency?

Federal, state, and local public health officials have been working seven days a week to try and slow the spread of COVID-19 in the U.S. and prepare for its impact. Take advantage of this time to prepare for the disruptions that may occur if, or more likely, when, the virus continues to spread.



Joe Ebel (Photo: Submitted photo)

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