



## COVID-19 Communications Response Plan Template

*\*Following is a template to follow to develop a response plan for internal and external communications. These should be customized for each organization based on its constituents, business model and geographic locations.*

**STEP 1: Identify your issues response team.** This is the group of people who will make decisions. It should include your CEO, office-level management, HR, PR lead and legal lead.

- Create a log of their contact information: Home, work, cell, work and personal email addresses
- Determine a time when this group will come together each day to review decisions that must be made and schedule a recurring meeting (which can be canceled if no decisions must be made on a particular day).
- Who is your primary spokesperson (internally and externally)? Who is the backup?

**STEP 2: Set up monitoring.** What resources does the issues response team need to review to make their decisions? And who is responsible for bringing forth new information to this group. Identify that person and establish a cadence for receiving updates.

At a minimum, we recommend monitoring the following resources:

- National & International Data
  - [CDC Guidelines for Employers](#)
  - [CDC Travel Advisories](#)
  - [CDC Risk Assessment Guidelines](#)
  - [John's Hopkins tracker of global cases](#)
  - [WHO](#)
- Local Data
  - State and City Departments of Health for each of your offices
  - City newspapers for each office

**STEP 3: Create COVID-19 procedures.** Establish criteria to ease decision-making.

These procedures should answer the following questions:

- How will you determine when an office will close? City-level states of emergency, outbreaks in towns that house your offices, employee anxiety? Here is an example of a tiered [model from the CEO of DoctorsonDemand](#).



- How will you alter your sick day policies? Will employees who travel to countries, states, and cities with outbreaks be asked to self-quarantine for 14 days prior to returning from the office?

*A sample of guidance from InkHouse to our managers:*

- *Employees should stay home if they are sick (or only a little sick) [link to sick policy]*
  - *If people feel sick, they should not come to work. Even if they are well enough to work, they should feel free to work from home.*
  - *If an employee comes to work sick, they should be sent home; they cannot return until they have been cleared by a doctor or been fever free for 24 hours.*
  - *Managers are the front lines on this, so they should be empowered to send people home. [COVID-19 symptoms](#).*
  - *If an employee has traveled to a country, state, or city with an outbreak, they should remain at home for 14 days.*
  - *If an employee has been in contact with a person who has or may have the coronavirus, they should work from home for 14 days.*
- How will you adjust your travel policies? Which regions are employees allowed to travel to? Can they stay overnight? If they travel for personal reasons, will you require them to be self-quarantined upon return?
  - What events are upcoming that may need to be taken virtual or rescheduled? Who is in charge of these and do you need a separate conversation about these? What tools do you have that would enable them to be done virtually?
  - Where can employees find information about your COVID-19 procedures? We recommend creating one place where everything is housed, and making it clear to everyone who they should go to with questions around benefits and sick leave. This should include reminders to employees about respiratory hygiene (wash hands, covering coughs and sneezes) and social distancing (staying home when they are sick, alternatives to handshakes).
  - What are your worst-case scenarios?

**STEP 4: Create a communications process.** Determine who will communicate COVID-19 updates, when and how (through which communications channels). Above all, being human makes all the difference. A dose of clarity, patience and kindness goes a long way.

- What is your policy regarding employees speaking to the press? We recommend making it clear that only the approved spokespeople are allowed to take media calls. *Establish a single person who should manage media inquiries. InkHouse is happy to be this contact.* Provide staff with this response in the event they are contacted directly:



“I will be glad to take your contact information and nature of your call and get it to the right people.”

In response to any questions: “I’m sorry but I’m not authorized to address your questions. Please allow me to get this to the people who are.”

**No one should go off the record with reporters.**

**STEP 5: Create business continuity plan.** How will business continue considering your new procedures? Consider the following for *internal* communications:

- What tools will you use to host internal and external meetings? Which video conferencing solutions do you have, and do you need to purchase one?
- Which collaboration tools will you rely upon?
- How will people communicate when they are available and unavailable while working from home?
- Will you ask them to maintain normal business hours?
- How will you handle employees whose children’s daycares and schools are closed?
- How will you keep spirits up and positive as much as possible?
- How will you personalize your response? Should your CEO do video updates to the teams? Community matters in difficult times.

InkHouse’s blog post on [How to Work From Home is here](#) with some suggestions.

Consider the following for *external* communications:

- Which customers, clients and partners will be impacted by your updated procedures?
- How will you mitigate these or reassure them?
- Who should that communication come from and in which format? Are there any personal phone calls that need to be made?
- Do you need to make a public statement on your website? (This will be more likely for B2C companies)

**STEP 6: Create your media statement(s).** You should be ready to answer the following media questions:

- Which offices are working from home?
- Which events have you canceled or taken virtual?
- Do you have any employees who’ve been infected?



- Do you have employees on quarantine? (Reminder that employee health information is protected under HIPPA and cannot be disclosed.)
- How has your business been affected?

*The PR team should draft holding statements for these questions with you.*

**STEP 7: Prepare for the worst.** Consider the worst-case scenarios from STEP 3 and create contingency plans and media statements for them *now*. When the time comes, clear thinking will not come as easily as it does right now.

## **THE ESCALATION PLAN: IF YOUR COMPANY HAS AN INFECTED EMPLOYEE (OR MORE).**

**STEP 1: Risk assessment.** Convene a call with the issues response team and determine the following:

- Who and how many have been affected?
- How many others could be affected? Who was with this person(s), where and when?
- Who needs to be notified? The health authorities? The local hospital? People who have could also be infected? And what are the legalities regarding how you do these notifications?
- What is the estimated timeline for the situation to resolve?
- Confirm chain of decision-making.
- Set up two to three times per day 15-minute check-ins for the issues response team.

**STEP 2: Materials production and preparation.**

- Create set of questions that will become an FAQ for your key audiences. *InkHouse can help draft this.*
- Internal and external statements. Samples:

Internal: Today we learned one of the employees in our XXX office has tested positive for Covid-19. This employee is at home recovering. As of today, all employees in XXX office will be working remotely.

We have been in contact with the employee and they have provided us with information about who they have been in contact with and we have begun reaching out to those employees. We have also employed XX strategies (work from home, cleaning, etc.)



We encourage employees to seek medical attention if they are not feeling well (please call your doctor/local emergency room before you visit).

External: We can confirm an employee in our XXX office has tested positive for Covid-19. We are employing a work from home strategy for the rest of our workforce and are following all of the CDC guidelines.

- **Prepare media spokesperson.** Practice run-through with FAQ and statements.  
*InkHouse issues management team coaching on blocking and bridging -- how to answer difficult questions.*
- **Prepare media statements for what will come next.** What is the next likely thing to happen in this situation and does your FAQ and your media statement(s) address it? If not, now is the time.

**STEP 3: Monitoring.** Establish a social and media listening post to monitor chatter and breaking news that may require statements from the company. This should also include monitoring for inaccuracies.