

# **Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency HIRTA**

## **PANDEMIC PLAN**

The following general guidelines are provided as a tool to ensure continuation of transportation services, while communicating to internal and external customers, and as an operational framework during an infectious emergency situation or pandemic outbreak.

One primary element during any emergency situation or pandemic is communication. Without a process for communication, misinformation can be circulated causing panic and disruption to services.

## **Communication Plan**

A communication plan is essential whenever there is a change to normal operating procedures.

### **Internal Communication**

- Educate employees on how to stop the spread of the virus and post the information around the workplace (including entrances, notice boards, meeting rooms and restrooms). Notices should contain information regarding hand hygiene, covering coughs and sneezes, and social distancing.
- Educate employees about infectious respiratory illnesses, such as influenza and post around the workplace. Notice should include information on transmission, how to prevent spread of the disease, including general hygiene measures such as cough etiquette and hand washing, medical follow-up for symptoms, isolation or quarantine, treatment with antiviral drugs

**External communication** (customers, other agencies, vendors, or any external party affected by service changes)

- The website and Facebook are the primary communication tool. However, Twitter should be used also for service update and/or interruptions to service.
- We can also use voice recording message for our customers regarding service status.
- When service changes are made during pandemics or other emergency situations, information needs to be updated as changes to service occur. At a minimum, daily updates to call centers, voice messages, or websites should be the goal.
- Once an event has reached its conclusion, a transition back to normal operation also needs to be communicated.

## **Containment Plan**

The primary avenue for combating the spread of an infectious disease is containment. To accomplish this, the Center for Disease Control (CDC), American Public Transportation Association (APTA) and the Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) suggest agencies step up their cleaning and maintenance program, and emphasize improved personal hygiene.

To accomplish this, it is suggested:

- Frequent disinfectant wipe downs are suggested on all surfaces that are or may come in contact with multiple users or the public. Any disinfectant would be adequate. HIRTA will likely use a 10% bleach solution depending on the specific pandemic.
- It is more important the cleaning be conducted on a daily, or more often basis, to achieve maximum containment.
- Frequent hand washing (soap and water is sufficient).
- Limit touching of face especially around the eyes, nose and mouth areas.
- Frequent use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer. (CDC recommends minimum 60%)
- Coughing and/or sneezing into your elbow.
- Staying home if you feel flu like symptoms: Excessive coughing, sneezing, fever, vomiting.
- HIRTA may need to readdress sick leave policies during pandemic outbreaks. Employees are more likely to return to work before they are well if they have exhausted their individual sick leave allotment.

- HIRTA makes all reasonable efforts to eliminate the need for travel by taking advantage of technology allowing us to communicate or otherwise operate electronically. Generally, in the event of a pandemic, travel on HIRTA's behalf is immediately suspended and limited to a select group of essential personnel who have obtained required travel authorizations from HIRTA's Executive Director and, when necessary, outside authorities.

*Note: The wearing of face masks for operators driving in vehicles is not suggested due to, that in a contained environment (like a bus), the humidity created by wearing a mask attracts microbial to the mask. Attracting microbial increases, the likelihood of attracting an infectious disease. Also, operators wearing masks while driving a vehicle may panic customers or create the perception riding transit is unsafe.*

*However, HIRTA will monitor CDC guidelines and make adjustments, for the safety of drivers and passengers, as necessary.*

### **Administration and Management**

It is anticipated during a pandemic outbreak up to 1/3 of the workforce could be unavailable to work (whether ill or caring for someone ill). In the event a pandemic illness reduces the availability of the workforce, the following guidelines are recommended for the continuation of service.

While there may be more flexibility with job duties among operators, administrative and management, employee's flexibility will be limited by the reduction of workforce due to the specific job duties they perform: trip scheduling, dispatch, payroll, etc.

To address this, we have processes and contingency plans in place for certain employees to work at home. This would mitigate the spread of any illness while providing the opportunity to get essential work accomplished.

Certain employees are also cross trained, whenever possible, to ensure continuity of service during any emergency.

The Board will have the discretion to approve Hazzard pay or bonuses for those employees who continue to work through a pandemic.

### **Bus Schedules / Operations**

- Establish priority trips and service areas.
- Prioritize routes/services accessing medical facilities: hospitals, pharmaceutical services, medical centers, dialysis centers, etc.
- Establish secondary routes/services including essential support to employment, grocery and social service centers.
- Identify non-essential trips, which is any routes/services that does not primarily service essential and medical services.

## **Pandemic Plan Recommendations**

### **Communication Plan**

#### **Interpandemic Period**

- Communication with staff
  - Providing information
- Communication with HIRTA customers
  - Provide information
- Approaches
  - Flyers
  - Email
  - Social Media
  - Website and RSS feed

Communicate with Internal customers with email and flyers on how to stop the spread of viruses. Coordination in this area will be handled by the Executive Director. Communication will need to be varied to keep the audience's interest.

Flyers – Flyers should be posted to places, like restrooms, with pertinent information. These flyers should be changed regularly, or as new information becomes available, to keep the information fresh.

E-mail –Email reminders should be sent educating staff on steps they can take to keep from getting sick, and/or spreading the virus.

Communicate with external customers via the website on what they can do, and include links to other helpful information. Coordination in this area should be handled by the Executive Director.

Web – The web page should be used for broadcast information of a general nature, as well as links to other useful information.

#### **Pandemic Alert Period**

**Who initiates communication? Who needs to be part of the communication? Who has shared access? What technology will be used?**

- Communication with staff
  - Monitoring availability
  - Providing direction and information
- Communication with HIRTA customers
  - Status of situation
  - Provide directions and information
- Approaches
  - Web
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - E-mail
  - Telephone
  - Media

Communication will be maintained via the use of the web, social media outlets, e-mail, telephone, and the media, depending upon the continued availability of each of these options. Coordination of this area of response will be

handled by the Executive Director or Business Manager if the Executive Director is unavailable. Communication will be needed for various audiences at different stages of the pandemic.

Web – The web page will be used for broadcast information of a general nature, including general HIRTA status information, and specific ‘illness’ related information. As needed, the webpage will include links to other useful information.

Social Media – Social media outlets should be used to broadcast information of a general nature, including general HIRTA status information, and specific ‘illness’ related information.

E-mail – Use e-mail as the situation develops to update staff and/or vendors, and those who agencies who may be affected by the news.

Telephone – HIRTA land-line telephones will be supported with essential staff. These telephones can be used to disseminate critical information to our customers via recorded voice mail messages.

Media – Critical messages may also be disseminated to the media via newspaper and radio broadcast messages.

### **Pandemic period**

#### **Who initiates communication? Who needs to be part of the communication? Coordination with Cities, Counties and Community Partners? Other issues to consider with employees is listed below?**

Communication will be maintained via the use of the web, social media outlets, e-mail, telephone, and the media, depending upon the continued availability of each of these options. Coordination of this area of response will be handled by the Executive Director. The coordination of all communication at this level needs to be consistent with state health department advisories and all communications should be cleared through the Executive Director or a designated spokesperson to ensure messages align.

Relationships have been established with medical and public health specialists who are able to help with the development of accurate and timely messages before and during an outbreak. Responsibility has been assigned for monitoring recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO), CDC, Federal Transit Administration, and state and local public health departments. Communicate with employees about where to find current, reliable information from federal, state and local public health organizations. Anticipate the potential fear and anxiety of staff as a result of rumors and misinformation and plan communications accordingly

#### ***Issues to consider with employees:***

Previously approved vacation, compensatory time, leave of absences (other than for sick or family leave purposes) may be rescinded with minimal notice.

- Employees may be required to report for work with minimal notice.
- Employees’ work schedules and/or hours of work may change with minimal notice.
- Employees may be directed not to report for work.
- Employees may be required to work at other locations or telecommute with minimal notice.
- Employees may be assigned overtime with minimal notice.
- Employees may be assigned to work other duties or to work in other areas with minimal notice.

## **Containment Plan**

### **Interpandemic Period**

- Infectious control measures with staff
  - Providing supplies
- Infectious control measures with HIRTA customers
  - Provide information, if necessary
- Approaches
  - On site
  - On buses, if necessary

Coordination of Infectious control measures with internal customers will be handled by the Operations Manager. The Operations Manager and Administrative Assistant will ensure HIRTA has an adequate supply of tissues, hand sanitizing gels, cloths for wiping down common surfaces and cleaning supplies for employees to maintain the buses. A list of the items initially is listed below:

- Hand sanitizer pumps – large bottles; available in breakroom, dispatch, scheduling office, kitchen sink area, reception area, conference room and all bathrooms.
- Hand sanitizer – will be available for employees to take and use on the bus.
- Disinfecting wipes – on all buses.

Continue with current cleaning schedule but stepped up to multiple times per day cleaning to disinfect frequently touched surfaces, if necessary. Vehicles are deep-cleaned regularly, year-round and undergo additional cleaning as necessary.

### **Pandemic Alert Period**

- Infectious control measures with staff
  - Providing supplies
  - Stepped up cleaning of common areas – breakroom, bathrooms, water fountains, etc.
- Infectious control measures with HIRTA customers
  - Provide information, if necessary
- Approaches
  - On site
  - On buses, if necessary

Emphasis should be placed on improved hygiene to staff so they remain vigilant at hand washing, and using sanitizing gel and wipes to clean touched surfaces. The Operations Manager will coordinate stockpiling the infectious control supplies mentioned above.

Protocols need to be established for frequent cleaning and disinfection of commonly used services in the office and in the buses.

## **Pandemic period**

- Infectious control measures with staff
  - Providing supplies
  - Thorough cleaning of common areas – breakroom, bathrooms, light switches, door knobs etc.
  - Provide directions and information
- Infectious control measures with HIRTA customers
  - Provide direction and information
  - Hand sanitizing gel on the bus is available to customers, if able
  - If customers are feeling ill, they are encouraged to wear a mask. HIRTA will try to have a supply on the buses to give to people who are in need.
- Approaches
  - On site
  - On buses

Coordination of Infectious control measures with internal customers needs to continue. Consider cancelling all not-essential face to face meetings. Monitor employees when they arrive at work for flu like symptoms. Continue to encourage respiratory and hand hygiene etiquette.

Protocols need to be established for frequent cleaning and disinfection of common used surfaces in the office and in the buses. It is recommended this be done daily during this period. Any bus that has been contaminated should be removed from service immediately to be cleaned and disinfected.

Recommend purchasing cleaning supplies and face masks (N95) for personnel responsible for cleaning common areas and buses.

## **Administration and Management**

### **Interpandemic Period**

Review pandemic plan and coordinate everyone's efforts.

### **Pandemic Alert Period**

Depending on the pandemic alert phase, the number of affected people, staff meetings should be held at least weekly to keep communication updated.

### **Pandemic period**

The first priorities during this period is to stay calm, don't react and frighten customers (internal and external).

We need to be mindful of face to face meetings and try and limit our exposure to each other. With that said daily meetings with pertinent staff will occur to communicate actions required by management. Non essential staff should not attend the meetings to limit their likelihood of exposure. They should be emailed updates regarding these meetings.

## **Bus Schedules / Operations**

### **Interpandemic Period**

No change to operations. Continue service on all schedules.

### **Pandemic Alert Period**

Depending on the pandemic alert phase, the number of affected drivers' schedules will be minimally affected.

### **Pandemic period**

Services will be determined by the number of employees affected and number of passengers needing service.

Bus capacities need to be monitored. If possible, we want to keep bus capacities lower, to spread people out and create social distancing.