

HEALTH CARE IT DEPARTMENTS: 5 STEPS FOR PREPARING FOR A PANDEMIC

The Center for Disease Control ("CDC") and numerous government agencies are providing guidance to Healthcare Delivery Organizations ("HDOs") of all sizes on how to proactively prepare for COVID-19, better known as, the Coronavirus. HDOs have been following this guidance and developing response procedures, should they become necessary. In order to support these efforts, there are several steps that an IT department should perform immediately.

1. **Engage in Preparedness Discussions:** It is imperative to the development of efficient response procedures that the IT department have senior leadership involved in the HDO's readiness planning discussions, as well as in collaborating with the various business and clinical units to determine their specific plans and needs. Based on those discussions and requirements, the IT team should be assessing any needs for application changes, specific reporting requirements, cost tracking or the standing up of command center infrastructures, including phones, conference bridges, computers, etc.
2. **Verify Virtual Care Systems:** Many health systems have virtual care systems or telemedicine systems that will allow patients to see a health care provider from the comfort of their home. If an organization has this capability, their IT team should assess the capacity of the system to ensure it can meet any forecasted increase in demand. It is important to engage and collaborate with any applicable telehealth vendors and the clinical business owners as needed in the course of this assessment.
3. **Assess Capacity for Increased Remote Workforce Demands:** If necessary, non-clinical workers may be asked to work from home to minimize the number of individuals physically onsite at the health system. Similarly, some employees may be required to work from a remote location if school systems and child care facilities begin to temporarily shut their doors. The IT department should review and become familiar with the organization's remote work force policies and technologies, forecast anticipated need and ensure the availability of sufficient capacity, including, internet/network capacity, hardware capacity, all necessary software licensing and provisioning for new remote users. Again, all applicable vendors should be engaged to collaborate and assist with this assessment and the increasing of capacity as needed. Training materials and quick reference guides should be reviewed for accuracy, updated as needed and appropriately communicated within the organization.
4. **Manage Remote IT Workforce:** Several large technology companies have already instructed employees located in certain geographic regions to stay home and work remotely. For any health systems with IT employees regularly working on site and sparingly working remote, leaders should ensure that employees have the necessary equipment and access in order to be fully functional when working remotely. This may involve issuing laptops or other hardware, providing access to remote systems and purchasing additional licenses. In addition, health system leadership should have a strategy and communication plan for effective management of a remote work force.
5. **Test and Verify Emergency Communication Methods:** Many health systems have multi-layered systems for sending out emergency communications to leaders and associates, which include utilizing text messaging, call lists and email. These systems should be tested and verified to ensure messages were received across all levels of the organization. In addition, the IT department should verify the contact information for all necessary resources. This includes, but is not limited to, clinical department leaders, technology/systems business owners, health system leadership, all information security and technology associates, any applicable third-party contacts and any additional resources in accordance with the organization's event and incident response procedures.

If you would like additional information or have any questions, Hall Render Advisory Services' team of trusted advisors is available at (317) 633-4884 or info@hallrenderas.com.

RESOURCES

[CDC: Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Hospital Preparedness Assessment Tool](#)

[Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response: COVID-19 Healthcare Planning Checklist](#)