Coronavirus: Safety First, but Prepare and Proceed

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The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was first identified in Wuhan, China, and the World Health Organization declared it a global public health emergency on January 30, 2020. According to this informative tracking tool created by Johns Hopkins, there are more than 100,000 confirmed cases to date, with 3 confirmed cases in the State of Ohio.

**Government Response**

The U.S. House and Senate have approved an $8.3 billion emergency funding measure to combat the coronavirus, which was signed by President Trump. All members of the Columbus Region congressional delegation and both of Ohio’s senators voted in the affirmative. Included in the funding was $20 million for the Small Business Administration to increase the administration of loans that could be given to businesses and non-profits negatively affected by the outbreak.

In a briefing with the White House, the outbreak was characterized as “dynamic and evolving,” and the role of local and state governments in containing its spread was stressed. We should expect the federal government to act in partnership with state and local officials to ensure mitigation and containment.

With 3 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Cuyahoga County, Governor DeWine has signed an executive order declaring a state of emergency that will allow for better coordination across state agencies in response to the outbreak. DeWine has appointed and convened a Health Advisory Group of doctors, created a website with resources for businesses and the public: coronavirus.ohio.gov, and hosted a summit for Ohio’s local public health departments and other administration officials. Further, the Ohio Department of Health has opened a public hotline specifically for COVID-19 which can be reached seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. The number is 1-833-4-ASK-ODH (1-833-427-5634). Ohio now has at least one testing kit from the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) that is operational. These kits are necessary in order to rapidly confirm contraction of the virus and implement a contact tracking system to reduce its spread. At the local level, Columbus Public Health has also issued updated guidance for employers.

The Center for Disease Control has a website dedicated to sharing information and guidance relating travel restrictions and events and mass gatherings. The CDC advises that businesses and individuals avoid all nonessential travel to countries listed as a geographic risk, which currently includes China, Iran, Italy, and South Korea. Travel to Japan and Hong Kong is also restricted. Continued travel domestically and to countries that do not pose a danger of community transmission. The Trump Administration is issuing travel advisory updates daily, and we should expect to see continued disruption in travel restrictions as cases rise in Europe and across the world.

**Employer Resources**

Our friends at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce have created a website and Coronavirus Toolkit dedicated to tracking the business impact of COVID-19 and providing resources for employers. We encourage you to review.

More than 80 countries have been impacted by COVID-19, making it more and more difficult to contain. Businesses should work to make sure internal policies are effective in the face of what may occur:

*This is a rapidly evolving situation and we will continue to provide updated information to our members as available.*
• Implement and test a Continuity of Work Plan that anticipates absenteeism and ensures coverage for all essential functions. It should contemplate output optimization if forced to operate virtually, and ensure networks are set up to handle increased remote access capacity.
• Institute and communicate strong sick leave policies that accommodate working remotely, and executives should lead by example- If you’re sick, then stay home.
• Disseminate information and supplies to encourage health and safety etiquette in the workplace.
• Offer conference call and video lines for meetings to limit close personal proximity.
• Limit travel and conference attendance where necessary and appropriate, and consider requiring self-quarantining employees that have traveled, even for non-work related purposes.

**Employer Guidance on Increased Network Access**

While most companies have a work from home capability, it may not be sized to accommodate a large number of employees taking advantage of it all at once. The team at HMB are IT experts, and urge businesses to prepare for this possibility by considering:

• Validating remote access for employees through VPN or cloud services with appropriate software installed and available (such as Office 365).
• Validating VPN concurrent license quantity is sufficient if users need to access on-premises applications
  - Some VPN solutions are licensed on a per-user basis and most companies do not have enough to cover the entire company
  - VPN should only be used by employees that need remote access to on-premises applications. If the applications are cloud-based and public internet-accessible, such as O365, they do not need a VPN.
• Your company’s internet bandwidth requirement
  - Once again, most companies have a large outbound network pipe that can accommodate user data going outbound. With work from home, a majority of the user traffic will shift to inbound traffic.
  - Because of this limited possibility, employees should be shifted to “Work from Home” in a phased approach, to help organizations better manage the impact on network utilization.
• Utilizing software such as Microsoft Teams to collaborate with colleagues.
• Continuing to make security a top priority by enforcing protocols such as multi-factor authentication on employee/admin logins and the use of conditional access.

**Economic Impact**

The U.S. Chamber projects economic growth to be approximately 1% in Q1, 0.7% in Q2, 1.2% in Q3, and 1.9% in Q4. On-staff economists do not believe COVID-19 will cause a recession. China has acted quickly in Q1 to address their crisis, which bodes well for the future. We will continue to watch and hope for strong containment before Q3. Elongated periods of recovery are expected in the areas that have been hit the hardest, such as parts of Asia, Iran and Italy.

Household spending at the upper-income ladders are sensitive to crises of this nature. Self-instituted quarantines and self-initiated risk aversion have the largest potential impact on household spending, so it is integral for the government to quell fears and instill calm in the American population through effective response strategies.

Supply chain disruptions will likely arise but will be temporary. Repatriation of supply chains didn’t occur with recent and substantial trade policy changes, so it is not likely that businesses will act to make

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major structural changes in the face of COVID-19. Nationally and locally, we have seen a decline in freight. However, the Rickenbacker International Airport is nimble and able to quickly address business needs – consider doing business with them if the virus has caused disruption to your current transportation strategy.

At the Columbus Chamber, it is our goal to ensure the most minimal adverse impact on the labor force and on the Columbus Region business community at large. There may be a need for government regulators to step in to assist. The fiscal authorities of the United States could move to create special lending instruments dedicated to providing assistance to small and midsize enterprises, which make up the heart and soul of the economy and the bulk of Columbus Chamber members. The Small Business Administration and the Federal Emergency Management Agency can move money if a disaster is declared by the President, for example. We will be tracking the impact and spread of the virus closely, and working with our partners in government at the local, state, and federal levels to limit its effect on our members and their workers.

How is your business preparing for the containment efforts? Willing to share best practices? How is your business being affected by the outbreak? Is your business positioned to help the community weather this storm? What additional information do you need from your Chamber? Contact Holly Gross, Vice President of Government Relations: HollyGross@columbus.org.

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