

Coronavirus (COVID 19): Key Messages

Top Line Messages

Protecting the energy grid and ensuring a safe and reliable supply of electricity are the top priorities of the electric power industry. In order to do this, investor-owned electric companies, public power utilities, and electric cooperatives need to ensure that their employees and their families are healthy and safe.

Planning for a health emergency, such as a pandemic, is unique from other business continuity planning because it requires businesses to prepare to operate with a significantly smaller workforce, a threatened supply chain, and limited support services for an extended period of time at an unknown date in the future.

- The business continuity and pandemic plans developed by electric companies, public power utilities, and electric cooperatives are designed to protect the people working for them and to ensure energy operations and infrastructure are supported properly.

America’s electric companies, public power utilities, and electric cooperatives are closely coordinating with their members and industry and government partners through the Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council (ESCC). This effective coordination ensures that organizations have the resources that they need to continue providing electricity to customers throughout any disruptions being caused by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Business Continuity Planning

The electric power industry has a strong track record of preparing for many kinds of emergencies that could impact the ability to generate and/or deliver electricity to the customers and the communities we serve.

- This business continuity planning includes preparing for events such as storms, earthquakes, and other natural disasters; cyber and physical attacks; and “high absenteeism” events that typically involve health emergencies and that could severely limit the number of employees who are able to report to work.
- Coordination through the ESCC has proven effective in responding to major weather events in recent years. Industry and government are using the same structure to provide reliable energy services in the weeks ahead.

Electric companies, public power utilities, and electric cooperatives could feel the effects of a pandemic much like any other business.

- It is predicted that during a pandemic, a large percentage of an organization’s employees could be out sick, quarantined, or might stay home to care for sick family members.
- Likewise, the vendors and suppliers that the electric power industry depends upon could experience similar personnel shortages.

Electric companies, public power utilities, and electric cooperatives focus on maintaining the availability of key personnel—such as power plant operators, lineworkers, and call center representatives—during extreme events, including a pandemic.

- Depending on the severity of a pandemic, it may be necessary to utilize contractors and other companies to help maintain service.

The electric power industry maintains constant situational awareness and typically focuses on three phases when preparing for a pandemic: Alert (Pre-Pandemic), Outbreak (Pandemic), and Recovery (Post-Pandemic).

Alert or Pre-Pandemic Phase

- During the Pre-Pandemic or Alert phase, the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issue statements about potential health emergencies, which signal to the electric power industry and other industries and businesses that a pandemic is possible and that preparations should begin.
- During this time, the electric power industry and individual organizations will monitor the situation; review their organizational policies; conduct training refreshers; communicate their plans; and emphasize personal preparedness and good hygiene.

Pandemic or Outbreak Phase

- During the Pandemic or Outbreak phase, electric companies, public power utilities, and electric cooperatives will activate their pandemic response plans to mitigate the impact of the outbreak on their workforces and their businesses operations.
- They will take actions to control the infection; maintain their operations; remain vigilant; and communicate actions taken.

Post-Pandemic or Recovery Phase

- Once public health officials have declared that the pandemic has passed, electric companies, public power utilities, and electric cooperatives will focus on the Post-Pandemic or Recovery phase.
- During this time, organizations will manage the return to business-as-normal; communicate the return to business-as-normal to external stakeholders; and review the response.

Industry-Government and Cross-Sector Coordination

The Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council (ESCC) serves as the principal liaison between the federal government and the electric power industry, with the mission of coordinating efforts to prepare for, and respond to, national-level disasters or threats to critical infrastructure. The ESCC includes electric power industry CEOs and trade association leaders representing all segments of the industry.

- The ESCC is holding coronavirus coordination calls twice a week with senior leadership from the Department of Energy, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to ensure that industry and government are working together to resolve any challenges that may arise during the health emergency.

The ESCC has developed a COVID-19 Resource Guide [linked here](#) and available at electricitysubsector.org.

- This document was designed to support electric power industry leaders in making informed localized decisions in response to this evolving global pandemic.
- The guide will evolve as additional recommended practices are identified and as more is learned about appropriate mitigation strategies.

Potential Impacts to Mutual Assistance Networks

Given that a pandemic outbreak could extend for as long as two months, or perhaps longer, it is possible—and in some parts of the country perhaps even likely—that weather-related or other types of outages could occur during the same time period that a community is affected by a pandemic.

- During non-health emergencies, such as severe storms, electric companies, public power utilities, and electric cooperatives often can speed restoration of electricity by bringing in additional skilled workers from organizations and contractors outside the area affected by the emergency. This practice is known as mutual assistance. However, during a pandemic, mutual assistance either may not be available or may be severely limited.
- Another factor that the electric power industry considers in its planning is the availability of equipment and materials for restoration. The electric power industry depends on many types of businesses to supply equipment and materials used in maintaining and restoring its infrastructure. A pandemic could affect all types of businesses, including manufacturing and transportation industries, and restoration times may be impacted.

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For More Information:
electricitysubsector.org
secretariat@electricitysubsector.org