## Purpose

This toolkit is designed to help private sector organizations, such as businesses, retail establishments, and nonprofit organizations, conduct a tabletop exercise about a novel infectious disease outbreak. This discussion will help organizations assess their business continuity plans, identify actions that can help them protect their employees and customers, and identify actions to minimize the impact of an outbreak on their business operations.

Table 1 describes the contents and purpose of each item contained in this toolkit. Items provided in Microsoft PowerPoint and Word may be edited and modified as desired.

**Table 1: Exercise Toolkit Modules**

| Item | File Type | Purpose |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Instruction Document | Adobe Acrobat | Provides instructions on how to use this toolkit |
| Exercise Conduct Slides | Microsoft PowerPoint | Provides a multi-media scenario presentation and questions for discussion |
| Player Handbook | Microsoft Word | Provides participants with a read-ahead containing instructions and general questions they should be prepared to discuss |
| Facilitator Guide | Microsoft Word | Provides the facilitator with sample questions/prompts for each module/topic to guide discussion |
| Participant Feedback Form Template | Microsoft Word | Provides participants with a template to document their immediate feedback following the exercise |
| Summary Report Template | Microsoft Word | Provides a template for the organization to have a written record from the exercise, including an overview of topics discussed and the resulting action plan |

As there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ exercise, organizations should use as much or as little of the content within this toolkit as desired. In particular, the number of topics and facilitator questions can be adjusted or modified to suit specific purposes or requirements.

The following step-by-step guide will help organizations use and tailor toolkit materials for their purposes.

## Step 1: Identify the topics you want to discuss

This toolkit is organized according to the modules and topics described in Table 2. Select the module(s) of most relevance to your organization’s goals for this exercise, and then select the topics you would like to include. For example, if your organization has a robust continuity plan, you may want to run an exercise that addresses a wide variety of topics to identify any planning gaps. However, if your organization is new to continuity planning, you may want to focus on only a few high priority topics and then follow up with additional exercises to build on these initial efforts. The approximate time to complete the key questions of each module/topic is also shown so that you can factor in time constraints. Selecting and asking questions from the ‘additional questions’ lists will require more time.

**Table 2: Exercise Toolkit Modules**

| Module | Topics | Approx. Duration |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. There is disease spread in the United States, but not yet in your area. | 1. Policy and Planning
 | 25 min |
|  | 1. Incident Management
 | 20 min |
|  | 1. Crisis Communications
 | 10 min |
|  | 1. Healthcare System Surge
 | 10 min |
| 2. The pandemic disease has reached your area, and there is significant contagion. | 1. Policy and Planning
 | 20 min |
|  | 1. Incident Management
 | 15 min |
|  | 1. Crisis Communications
 | 15 min |
|  | 1. Healthcare System Surge
 | 10 min |
| 3. New cases have slowed/ stopped, but a second wave is possible in the near future. | 1. Policy and Planning
 | 25 min |
|  | 1. Incident Management
 | 10 min |
|  | 1. Crisis Communications
 | 10 min |

## Step 2: Schedule the exercise and invite participants

Identify which personnel in your organization have roles and responsibilities related to the topics you selected in Step 1. Suggestions include representatives from human resources, legal, information technology, operations, finance, risk management, and business continuity. Select a date and time for the exercise, and schedule enough time to accommodate the modules/topics you have selected. Send invitations to the exercise to those personnel you have identified to attend. Make sure you book a room in your facility that can accommodate all of the invitees and that you have appropriate audiovisual equipment. The exercise could also be conducted virtually via a webinar or similar technology if your organization’s personnel are dispersed at different locations, or if the majority of your staff work from home.

## Step 3: Identify the staff who will conduct the exercise

Identify a facilitator who will lead the exercise and moderate the discussion. This could be an employee who has knowledge of your organization’s continuity program or an employee who is an experienced meeting facilitator. Identify one or more note-takers who will capture the discussion, and determine who will develop a summary report on the exercise.

## Step 4: Prepare the materials

Review the PowerPoint slides for the modules you have selected. You may add or delete information, as you deem necessary. Review the facilitator guide for the modules/topics you have selected. Identify which questions you want to focus on, deleting those that are not as relevant, and/or adding any additional questions that are specific to your organization.

Decide if you would like to provide materials to participants ahead of time and determine what materials you would like to hand out to participants at the exercise. These could include copies of your organizations policies and plans, an agenda for the exercise, the participant feedback form, and/or the Player Handbook. Send materials you would like participants to read in advance. Print out any materials you would like the participants to have during the exercise.

Conduct a pre-meeting with your facilitator, note-takers, and any supporting staff (e.g., audiovisual support) to review plans for the exercise and make sure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities.

## Step 5: Conduct the exercise

Ensure the room is set up in a manner that promotes discussion. Small groups do best seated around a single table. Larger groups may be seated in small groupings, representing functional areas.

The facilitator should introduce the exercise, have participants introduce themselves if they do not know each other, guide participants through the process of reviewing the scenario slides and videos, and then moderate a discussion of the questions. The facilitator should be mindful of time, ensuring all of the questions are discussed in the time available. The facilitator should also make sure that everyone has a chance to speak and that more vocal participants are not allowed to dominate the discussion.

The exercise should close with a “hot wash” where participants are asked to provide one-to-three of their most important takeaways from the exercise. This is a valuable way to capture high priority items while they are still fresh in the participant’s minds. If you choose to use the feedback form, hand those out to participants and ask them to fill them in before leaving. If that’s not possible, provide a specific time and date to return the form, preferably the same day.

## Step 6: Develop an exercise summary report

Review the notes captured during the exercise and develop a list of the items that your organization needs to address as a result of the discussion. These could be gaps in your existing plans that you need to fill, or actions (e.g., develop policy or guidance, identify essential staff/functions) your organization needs to take to be better prepared. Include a brief description of the issue and document any recommendations that participants raised for how to address the issue. You can use the template we have included or something more specific to your organization. You may want to have the facilitator, or others involved in organizing the exercise, review the report before finalizing it. Once it is finished, the report should be presented to your organization’s leaders. Your organization’s leaders should then prioritize the list of items, assign responsibility for addressing each item, and develop a timeline for completion.