Pandemic plans encouraged for all businesses

By Joe Gardyasz

By the end of the seminar, shaking hands no longer seemed like such a good idea.

Not after hearing that a single person who has a particularly bad case of the avian flu could infect every one of the 75 people at the meeting merely by walking through the room.

Health experts worldwide have been calling a global pandemic of a deadly strain of avian flu an eventual certainty. Last Wednesday, that message was brought home during a business continuity seminar held at Holmes Murphy & Associates Inc. in West Des Moines.

Regina Phelps, president of Emergency Management & Safety Solutions Inc., is an internationally recognized expert in emergency management and contingency planning. She was contracted by the insurance brokerage to conduct the half-day seminar, which ended with a two-hour session detailing how businesses must plan for an avian flu pandemic.

“In most emergencies, you evacuate to safety at Wolf Construction in West Des Moines. ‘I think the fact that they offered this opportunity to me shows that they are open to learning about these things’.”

Jeff Howard, a senior business contingency planner with Meredith Corp., said his company is still in the early stages of planning.

“We have to do a lot of research,” he said. “There hasn’t been an active effort, but it’s in our plans to do that.”

Before a plan is disseminated to employees, it will have to be well thought-out, Howard added. “You don’t want to scare people. You draw a fine line between educating people and scaring them.”

More information on avian flu and business contingency planning for a pandemic may be found at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site, www.cdc.gov/flu/avian, and at www.promedi flu.gov/plan/pdf/businesscheck-list.pdf. To monitor the spread of the H5N1 virus online, businesses can register at www.promedmail.org.”

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