

**Preparing for Avian:
Honest System, Pill Shortage, and Inept Governments**

**BDO Dunwoody/Chamber Weekly CEO/Business Leader Poll
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1.0. Introduction

CEOs and business leaders are inclined to believe that Canada will ultimately not experience a pandemic within two years. They nonetheless believe that Canada is under-prepared, possessing too few pills for treating the condition if it erupted on a large scale. Despite the insufficient supply, the overwhelming majority are confident that pills would be distributed fairly according to need rather than according to networks of influence and political power.

The federal government earns a bare passing grade while provincial governments receive failing grades for their role in preparing the country for a possible pandemic.

Employers seem to have taken few precautions themselves. According to the panel of CEO and business leader respondents, almost none have acquired their own supply of pills. Few organizations are prepared, and they seem to be paying less attention to a possible outbreak of the flu among employees than they were in the case of SARS during the SARS crisis.

The overwhelming majority do not believe that employers should be held accountable if an employee contracts Avian flu during the course of work.

The theme of Avian flu and government preparations touched a chord with respondents, who volunteered an exceptional number of verbatims on the topic. We devote a special section to their volunteered comments, which are diverse in their content and inclinations.

These are the key findings from this week's COMPAS web-survey of CEOs and business leaders for *The Financial Post* on behalf of BDO Dunwoody LLP and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

2.0. Low Risk, Inadequate Pill Supply, Distribution Would Be Honest

Panellists do not believe that an Avian pandemic will reach Canada within two years. On a 100 point probability scale, respondents assign a 41% probability for an Avian pandemic in the country within this 24 month period, as shown in table 2A.



Table 2A: (Q1) As you may know, there is talk of Avian flu and its potential rise to pandemic proportions. Using a 100 point probability scale where 100 means that we will definitely have a pandemic within two years and 0 definitely not, what is your estimate of its probability?

MEAN	DNK
41	1

While doubting that a pandemic would take place on Canadian soil, CEOs and business leaders nonetheless feel that our country's current supply, adequate for 3.5 million patients, is insufficient, as shown in table 2B. On the positive side, the overwhelming majority is confident that Canadian authorities would distribute the pills fairly in the event of a crisis, as shown in table 2C. The issue of fairness was raised in the survey because it has emerged in media discussions in recent days.

*Table 2B: (Q5) Canadian governments have enough anti-flu pills to treat 3.5 million patients. Given facts on the ground and Canada's population, do you think that this amount is...
[ROTATE POLES]*

	%
Far too low	24
Somewhat low	49
About right	21
Somewhat high	3
Far too high	1
Don't know or no opinion	1

Table 2C: (Q7) If hypothetically there were a shortage of pills, do you think that the available supply would be distributed...[ROTATE]

	%
On a fairness basis according to need (e.g. vulnerable patients, emergency personnel, centres of disease)	74
On a preferential basis to the best connected	23
Don't know or no opinion	3



Respondents were pressed to indicate the kinds of groups who would have privileged access to the pills in the event of a major crisis if indeed distribution were less than fair-minded. Panellists tend to believe that all privileged groups—from hospital executives to politicians—would get ahead of the line if indeed distribution were unfair (2D) which they do not expect it to be (2C).

Table 2D: (Q8) If government-acquired pills were not distributed entirely on the basis of need, please score the comparative likelihood of each of the following groups getting to the head of the line using a 7 point scale where 7 means high priority and 1, the opposite. [RANDOMIZE]

	MEAN	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	dnk
Top hospital executives and their families	6.0	53	18	11	4	2	2	5	5
Well connected physicians and their families	6.0	51	21	9	3	3	3	3	5
Pharmaceutical executives and their families	5.9	52	19	9	3	4	2	6	5
Top health ministry officials and their families	5.7	44	20	15	4	5	3	5	5
Influential politicians and their families	5.6	42	20	14	7	3	4	5	5
Big hospital donors and their families	4.8	23	17	17	17	6	7	8	5

3.0. Employers Largely Inattentive—At Least as Inattentive as in SARS Situation

As shown in tables 3A-C, almost no employers have had plans to acquire pills for their staffs; they generally taken few precautions; and they appear to be taking fewer precautions than in April, 2003 at the time of the SARS concern.



Table 3A: (Q6) Are you aware of any organizations that have acquired or are planning to acquire pills for the benefit of staff in the event of a crisis?

	%
Yes	3
No	97
Don't know or no opinion	0

Table 3B: (Q2) According to the media, the Public Health Agency of Canada has estimated an Avian flu pandemic could make over 10 million Canadians too sick to work. To what extent is your organization prepared for large scale absence as a result of illness? Please use a 7 point scale where 7 means very prepared, and 1 the opposite.

MEAN	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	dnk
2.5	3	3	7	8	19	25	33	2

*Table 3C: (Q3) Employers could react to an Avian flu outbreak by watching employees more carefully, sending them home at the earliest sign of any flu-like symptom, making emergency plans in case of a contagion at the workplace, introducing strong hygiene practices, or taking other precautions. So far as you can tell, are employers taking...¹
[ROTATE POLES]*

	Avian Flu	SARS
	Oct. 2005	April 2003
A lot more precaution than normal	2	7
Somewhat more	15	27
No more and no less than normal	79	60
Somewhat less than they would in normal times	1	0
A lot less precaution than they would in normal times	1	1
Don't know or no opinion	1	5

¹ April 14, 2003 question wording: "Turning now to the issue of SARS, employers can react to the SARS outbreak by watching employees more carefully, sending them home at the earliest sign of any flu-like symptom, making emergency plans in case of a contagion at the workplace, introducing strong hygiene practices, or taking other precautions. So far as you can tell, are employers taking [ROTATE POLES]"



4.0. No Legal Responsibility for Employers—As in SARS' Case

As in the case of SARS, panellists do not believe that employers should be liable if their staff contract the disease through the course of their work, as shown in table 4.

Table 4: (Q4) If an employee contracted Avian flu through the course of his work, do you think that the employer should be held liable?² [ROTATE POLES]

	Avian Flu	SARS
	Oct. 2005	April 2003
Definitely not	64	74
Probably not	28	21
Probably	5	4
Definitely	1	0
Don't know or no opinion	1	1

5.0. Bare Pass Grade for Ottawa, Failing Grades for Provinces

As shown in table 5, panellists judge federal performance on the issue poorly, albeit more favourably than the performance of the provinces.

Table 5: (Q9) On a 100 point school report card-type scale, for its leadership on the issue of Avian flu, what performance score would you give...?

	Mean	DNK
The federal government	52	2
Your provincial government	45	2

² April 14, 2003 question wording: "If an employee contracted SARS through the workplace, do you think that the employer should be held liable? [ROTATE POLES]"



6.0. Topic Strikes a Chord—Voluminous Comment

The volunteered comments of respondents were voluminous but too diverse for easy summary or distillation.

One theme was that governments have performed as well as can be reasonably expected. “The federal and provincial levels of government will not do anything until there is a crisis. That is just the way it works,” wrote one business leader. According to the CEO of a manufacturing company, “The point is that if we in fact are hit by any large-scale problem, be it the flu, earthquake, hurricane or what have you, our government cannot ‘save us’. We are vulnerable to the ‘wrath of nature’ just as all other species that inhabit the earth.” “This is a huge and difficult situation, and very difficult to guard against,” volunteered the CEO of a firm in oil and gas.

On a related theme, some respondents opined that the likelihood and impact of an Avian pandemic are unknowable. “The Tamiflu pill is likely not going to be effective as the virus continues to mutate. Stay healthy,” advised a retail executive. “Avian flu is a case of extrapolation far outside the data points. Remember the 1976 Swine Flu non-epidemic?,” commented the CEO of a technology consultancy.

On another matter, some respondents acknowledged the possibility that some individuals with bureaucratic or political influence might queue-jump. One respondent called for a thorough audit of medication use following a pandemic. Given the likelihood of “skimming,” said one business leader, “there should be a well-defined priority list, starting with medical care-givers and other emergency personnel. “ Another called for using the force of criminal law against any who abused authority.

On a related matter, some respondents criticized the inclusions of questions on the possibility of privileged or unfair access to the pills, albeit from different perspectives. One respondent suggested that it was needless to ask about the possibility of queue jumping in the future since it is rampant at present. “Why would this be any different than the actual two-tier system we already live with [inside the public healthcare system]? The health system is a nightmare.” By contrast, three other respondents felt that the questions ought not to be asked because such questions are needlessly sensational. As the owner of a chemicals firm put it, these two questions served only to show a “lack confidence in government in the event of a crisis.”³

On another theme, several respondents chastised both governments and media for weak leadership in disseminating information. “Where is the educational information on the issue?”, asked one respondent. “No one is saying what we as companies can do

³ In practice, the overwhelming majority of respondents have confidence in the fairness but not the efficacy of government, as reported above.



about it: there is no guidance,” volunteered one CEO. “The governments (all levels) say they have plans but these have not been shared. Let’s start sharing best practices.”

7.0. Methodology

The *National Post*/COMPAS web-survey of CEOs and leaders of small, medium, and large corporations and among executives of the local and national Chambers of Commerce was conducted October 26-28, 2005. Respondents constitute an essentially hand-picked panel with a higher numerical representation of small and medium-sized firms.

Because of the small population of CEOs and business leaders from which the sample was drawn, the study can be considered more accurate than comparably sized general public studies. In studies of the general public, surveys of 150 are deemed accurate to within approximately 8.0 percentage points 19 times out of 20. The principal and co-investigator on this study are Conrad Winn, Ph.D and Tamara Gottlieb.

