



Crisis Response Considerations: COVID-19

News about the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is developing very quickly. Companies – regardless of geography – are faced with the daunting task of making critical decisions with imperfect information. Right now, in every office building, in every city, across the globe, executives are huddled in conference rooms debating how to respond to this growing crisis. They are confronted with the unenviable task of balancing protective measures against costly decisions that will inevitably disrupt business. There is no perfect, or even good answer. All decisions are fraught with risk and may result in reputational harm, or worse yet, harm to human health.

Welcome to the world of crisis management. Every crisis – regardless of the nature and scope – shares similar features, and our [Baker Botts Crisis Response Team](#) has surveyed our team of experienced crisis response professionals and shares battle-tested tips and advice for navigating this global crisis. Making smart decisions in dynamic, high-stakes situations is stressful and challenging. Below we have distilled advice that may be useful as companies engage in response planning.

- **Develop a core crisis decision-making team.** Decisions must be tactical and made quickly – at least at the pace that events are developing. Appoint a nimble team of individuals who possess the background and training to assess the available information and act deliberately and swiftly. The team should have the authority to operate independently and free from too much oversight.
- **Use current information.** Update information daily and make sure all decisions are based on current information.
- **Recognize the challenges of crisis decision-making.** Effective decision-making in a crisis requires that you make an objective, realistic assessment of your options and then focus on the most essential company priorities such as public safety and employee safety. Normal business imperatives such as continuity of operations may not be an achievable goal. Continuously reconsider and reframe your priorities.
- **Consider retaining a communications consultant or other subject matter expert.** During a crisis, certain decisions may put a company at risk for experiencing reputational harm. Working with a communications consultant or a subject matter expert may be helpful. In a rapidly evolving situation, it is important to use expert advice carefully.
- **Strive to make decisions that are uniformly protective and void of bias.** The coronavirus has provoked intense feelings of fear. A poorly guided, yet well-intentioned company policy that focuses on people from a certain geographic region, or a policy that favors salaried workers over lower level hourly workers, may be both ineffective and controversial. To the extent possible, your crisis team should include representatives who are vigilant about such concerns.