



Bioterrorism Update

A bi-monthly publication of the Region D
Bioterrorism / Emergency Response Team



Attention Focused on Influenza Pandemic

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International Focus on Influenza

President Bush's recently announced he plans to ask Congress for 7.1 billion dollars to prepare for pandemic influenza. The announcement followed increasing concern among health officials over avian influenza, which has currently spread to birds in 16 countries, infected 121 people and killed 62 people worldwide.

The \$7.1 billion plan would provide funding for early detection, containment and treatment in an outbreak. It would also work to improve the vaccine manufacturing process and increase stockpiles of antiviral medications.

In his statement, President Bush said, "Scientists and doctors cannot tell us where or when the next pandemic will strike, or how severe it will be, but most agree: at some point, we are likely to face another pandemic." He added, "If an influenza pandemic strikes, every nation, every state in this Union, and every community in these states, must be ready."

Tabletop Exercises Address Pandemic Flu Response Plans

Recent tabletop exercises in both Taney County and the greater Joplin area utilized an avian influenza-like scenario to discuss planning and response needs should pandemic influenza strike southwest Missouri.



Joplin tabletop exercise addresses health care response to pandemic influenza.

The Taney County exercise included area partners such as traditional first responders, emergency management, public works, the hospital and others. The Joplin exercise focused only on the health care response, with participation from local public health departments, hospitals, federally qualified health centers and emergency medical services.

Both exercises identified risk communication as a key response strategy. Participants felt strongly that the public would need to be told the truth early and be kept up-to-date on information as it developed.

Both groups also stressed the need to work together and communicate well with local partners, as well as regional, state and federal partners.

Local Flu Clinics Test Public Health SNS Distribution Plan

Local public health departments in Newton and McDonald Counties utilized this year's influenza vaccination clinics to further prepare for an influenza pandemic situation. Should mass vaccination become an option for pandemic response, these health departments would use their plans to distribute the Strategic National Stockpile inventory to provide antiviral medication or vaccinations to help control the pandemic.

In early November staff practiced setting up mass distribution clinics, notifying the public and managing traffic and patient flow in conjunction with their annual flu vaccination clinics.

Newton County vaccinated approximately 400 county residents in a little less than an hour. McDonald County vaccinated approximately 300 in the first 90 minutes.

Both LPHAs were able to identify weaknesses in their plans and make adjustments quickly. They utilized communications systems and local partners to assist with security and traffic. They also pulled in a number of community volunteers to supplement staff.

Both counties agree the experience was worth the effort and feel more confident now about their ability to respond to a large-scale public health emergency.



McDonald County utilizes flu clinic as mass medication dispensing exercise.

Pandemic Planning Resources

A number of resources are now available online to assist local communities with planning for avian influenza or pandemic influenza.

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services recently launched www.PandemicFlu.gov in order to provide comprehensive information on both pandemic influenza and avian influenza.

The University at Albany School of Public Health introduces a six-module online course on pandemic influenza that “explores the epidemiology, historical context, and response efforts related to seasonal and worldwide influenza outbreaks.” To register, visit www.ualbanycphp.org/learning/registration/default.cfm.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Agency for Healthcare and Research Quality recently released a report to help health care professionals plan for and respond to bioterrorism events and other public health emergencies. It provides guidance on decontamination, personal protective equipment, laboratory capacity and isolation and quarantine issues. The report, titled Development of Models for Emergency Preparedness, can be read or downloaded at www.ahrq.gov/research/devmodels/index.html.

Education Will Help Physicians Diagnose BT-Related Illness

A recent study by Johns Hopkins University implies most U.S. physicians are not well enough versed to diagnose or treat illness caused by bioterrorism agents. Prior to taking an online course, only 25.4% of participating physicians correctly diagnosed and treated diseases like botulism, anthrax, smallpox or plague. After completing the training course, however, 79% showed correct disease management.

The Department of Homeland Security recently began funding training for health professionals on the threat of bioterrorism. However, previous commitments of \$252 million for “health professions training activities” have been cut from the executive branch’s proposed 2006 budget.

The study was published in the September 26 issue of Archives of Internal Medicine.

Communities Receive NIMS Training

Recent requirements from the federal government state that jurisdictions undergo training on the National Incident Management System (NIMS) in order to receive federal funding in fiscal year 2007.

The St. Clair County Health Department recently held mandatory staff training in order to meet these requirements. Within a three-week period all staff members completed ICS-100, IS-700 and IS-800.

Spokesperson Jeanne Millsap says, “We made it work because everyone in our department feels it is better to be prepared. We also want to have knowledge of what to expect, rather than be looking for answers during an event.”

NIMS integrates effective practices in emergency preparedness and response into a comprehensive national framework for incident management. The system will enable responders at all levels to work together more effectively to manage domestic incidents no matter what the cause, size or complexity.

Homeland Security identifies the benefits of the NIMS system as follows:

- Standardized organizational structures, processes and procedures;
- Standards for planning, training and exercising, and personnel qualification standards;
- Equipment acquisition and certification standards;
- Interoperable communications processes, procedures and systems;
- Information management systems; and
- Supporting technologies – voice and data communications systems, information systems, data display systems and specialized technologies.

For more information on NIMS, visit the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) website at www.fema.gov/nims/.

For more information on the BERT Update, call the Springfield BERT Office at (417) 874-1205 or visit us online at www.swmobert.com.