

A Prepared Ohio

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Federal Planning

Winter 2007

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Article submissions

Do you have an idea for an article? Would you like to submit an article you've already written? Contact the

Working Together - Ohio Businesses Plan for Flu Pandemic

Lake County Health Department Educates and Collaborates for Success *Submitted by Dawn Cole, Preparedness Specialist*

The Lake County General Health District (LCGHD) focused its 2006 pandemic influenza preparedness efforts on collaboration and education. We developed message maps, fact sheets and articles for all phases of an influenza pandemic as well as a crisis communication plan, all of which have been shared with northeast Ohio regional public health partners. We are working with our local emergency management agency director and a consultant to revise the latest draft of our pandemic influenza plan to ensure it is compliant with the National Incident Management System and will be included with the county plans.

LCGHD chairs a Pandemic Flu/All-Hazards Committee that first met in 2006 to discuss various issues pertaining to pandemic influenza planning for Lake County. Membership consists of local law enforcement, fire departments, community groups, funeral homes, government agencies, universities, industry, public utilities, health care agencies, faith-based organizations, school systems and volunteer organizations.

LCGHD also conducted a pandemic flu tabletop exercise in August 2006. The purpose of the exercise was to give the participants an opportunity to test and evaluate plans, procedures and the decision-making processes involved in the response to a pandemic flu outbreak in the Northeast Ohio Regional Medical Response System area. In addition to LCGHD employees, many local businesses, health care providers, government agencies and community organizations participated in the tabletop. Representing the business community were Brunner Funeral Homes, Con-way, Euclid General Hospital, First Energy Corporation, Lake County Department of Utilities, Lake Hospital System, Laketran (local public transit system), Lubrizol Corporation and STERIS Corporation.

All participants agreed the tabletop and subsequent discussion were beneficial and would assist them in their own pandemic planning efforts. This tabletop exercise was a precursor to a Northeast Ohio Regional Pandemic Flu Functional Exercise slated for February 2007. LCGHD held a mass vaccination clinic in November 2006 in collaboration with local college nursing students, senior centers and law enforcement and a second mass vaccination clinic in December 2006 to test Secure Wireless Inventory Pharmaceuticals Emergency Response System, a computer system used to track mass distribution of medicines.

The brochure "[Get Prepared - What your Family Can Do About Bird Flu](#)" by Ohio Department of Health has been well received in Lake County and local senior centers, public utilities departments, universities and other groups have requested several copies. Other educational materials ordered for next year to intensify efforts of pandemic influenza planning awareness include the brochures "Pandemic Flu and Hygiene – A Key to Slowing its Spread," "Seasonal Flu, Pandemic Flu and Bird Flu – What You Need to Know" and "How You Can Prepare for a Flu Pandemic" all by Channing Bete Co. Several copies of the DVD "Why Don't We Do It In Our Sleeves?" about proper coughing and sneezing etiquette have also been purchased. This video is available from <http://www.coughsafe.com>.

LCGHD was invited to speak about pandemic influenza for an employee meeting at Kirtland County Club. We also spoke on pandemic influenza at the Lake County school superintendents meeting in January.

Plan Now for an Influenza Pandemic

Although public health influenza pandemic planning efforts began years ago, 2007 may find

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Pandemic flu plans

Want to share your plan with others in Ohio? Contact an editor.

Upcoming events

Contact an editor if you would like us to post your upcoming pandemic influenza meeting or event on this Web site.

other organizations without a formal written plan.

A flu pandemic likely will cause high rates of absenteeism from work and school; up to 40 percent of employees may be home sick or caring for sick family members. A written plan will allow those who may need to step in during a pandemic to carry out duties and fill jobs. A pandemic flu plan should contain steps your organization will take to minimize the effects of a flu pandemic on the organization and the people it serves.

There is no single template for drafting a pandemic flu plan – plans should be tailored to the organization – but continuity of operations is an important concept to consider when planning for any emergency.

Continuity of operations planning for a pandemic determines how your organization will continue to provide needed products or services if up to 40 percent of employees or volunteers are home sick or caring for sick loved ones. This aspect often exists as a component of all-hazard or weather-related emergency plans, which already exist in most organizations.

Adapting existing emergency plans to include pandemic influenza is a good first step. During a pandemic, businesses may consider relaxing employee sick leave policies or implementing telecommuting. Schools should plan for extended closures with alternative teaching methods. Community groups need to recognize and plan for the danger of losing volunteers to illness or care-giving roles. Consider how an influenza pandemic may effect the organization, then address those issues in your emergency plan.

There are many resources available to aide planning efforts. Reach out to other organizations similar in size for help in drafting a plan. Local emergency management agencies and health departments may be able to provide some guidance. Planning resources are also available at <http://www.ohiopandemicflu.gov>.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a variety of planning tools available including a software package called [Flu Aid](#), designed to assist state and local level planners in preparing for an influenza pandemic; and FluSurge, a model which enables hospital administrators and public health officials to estimate the surge in demand for hospital-based services during an influenza pandemic.

The CDC also has checklists available to spark planning efforts for businesses, schools, communities and local government at <http://www.pandemicflu.gov>.

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Preparing Employees for an Influenza Pandemic

If your business has been preparing for a flu pandemic, many of the items on your checklist should relate to preparing your employees both before and during a pandemic. These preparations require action by both employers and employees. The following actions were taken from the “[Business Preparedness](#)” A-Z checklist created by the Ohio Department of Health. Look at your checklist to determine whether your plan will adequately prepare employees.

Forecast and allow for employee absences and develop policies specific to a pandemic such as additional sick-leave compensation and policies concerning when a previously sick employee may return to work.

Employer: Be prepared to deal with absenteeism of up to 40 percent and to implement rules to protect workers and minimize further spread of the virus in the workplace. Notify employees of policies that will be in effect during a pandemic.

Employee: Employees should understand how the employer’s policies may affect them during a pandemic and plan accordingly.

Implement an exercise or drill to test your plan periodically.

Employer: This is important to identify areas of improvement and could help alleviate employees’ concerns as well.

Employee: Participate in drills if applicable and consider how what you learn could impact your job responsibilities.

Provide infection control kits (hand sanitizer/hand washing stations, tissues, waste receptacles).

Employer: Consider providing infection control kits in areas where people gather such as conference rooms, break rooms, cafeterias and restrooms. If there are procedures or policies that prevent employees taking personal protective measures, discuss with management in advance how to address these during a pandemic.

Employee: Evaluate your workspace and improve infection control where needed. Consider using alcohol wipes to periodically disinfect shared equipment such as telephones in your work area. Keep tissues nearby to prevent spreading germs. If possible, keep your own bottle of hand sanitizer in your work area.

Evaluate employee access to and availability of mental health and social services such as community- and faith-based resources during a pandemic and improve services as needed.

Employer: An effective manager is familiar with the many facets of worker stress and takes a wide range of steps to integrate stress management strategies in the workplace. Besides assuring availability of outside services, you must assume shared responsibility for promoting a positive and healthy work environment and not rely exclusively on workers initiating their own self-care practices. You must also manage your own self-care. Address the following dimensions when designing a stress management plan that prioritizes environmental and organizational health:

- Effective management structure and leadership.
- Clear purpose, goals and training.
- Functionally defined roles.
- Administrative controls.
- Team support.
- Plan for stress management.

Employee: Understand stress-management resources available to you during a pandemic. Evaluate your current self-care practices and improve where needed.

Offer links to reliable, up-to-date pandemic information from public health and emergency management sources

Employer: If your company has an Intranet site, consider using it to provide information to your employees. Other means of communication could include a television network, e-mail, memos, fliers in break rooms or intercom announcements. Determine what communication methods your company has available during times of crises.

Employee: Share information with your family. Awareness can help alleviate your family's anxiety and improve your ability to weather the pandemic.

Disseminate a quick guide to pandemic fundamentals such as signs of influenza, modes of transmission, personal and family protection and response strategies.

Employer: These materials are readily available from your local health department or other response agencies and on this Web site's [publication library](#). Gather the information and provide to employees. You might consider disseminating the packages during a company meeting and asking the company nurse or pandemic flu plan coordinator to address the employees about the information they are receiving. Refer them to experts when needed.

Employee: Share this information with your families. Understand what your family can do to help prevent contracting the flu.

Understand the capabilities and plans of insurers, health plans and major health care facilities.

Employer: Your benefits administrator can assist with this assessment. He or she should also be aware of how local responders are planning to handle patient overflow. Some areas have contracted with schools to utilize their space for health care during a pandemic. Know what is planned for your community and communicate this information to employees.

Employee: Share this information with your family. Assess your readiness.

Encourage pneumococcal and seasonal influenza vaccinations for employees as appropriate and following public health recommendations.

Employer: Although seasonal flu vaccines will not protect against pandemic influenza, they can prevent absenteeism due to seasonal flu and provide an opportunity to educate employees about the types of flu viruses and vaccines. Your benefits administrator or company nurse could assist you in organizing on-site vaccinations.

Employee: If you don't normally get flu vaccinations, consider doing so.

Develop platforms such as hotlines and dedicated Web sites for communicating pandemic status and actions to employees, vendors, suppliers and customers in a consistent and timely manner.

Employer: For a larger company, this capability might already exist for other emergencies. If this could benefit your company or decrease potential economic losses, evaluate the costs of these programs and implement accordingly.

Employee: Understand what information is available to you and to those you work with outside your company.

Improve or upgrade up your company's communication and technology infrastructure to support telecommuting and remote-access needs.

Employer: Assess your company's capabilities and jobs that can be completed remotely. Work with your technology leader to plan for transitioning jobs to home-based sites in the event of a pandemic. In moving as many jobs as possible to remote locations, you will reduce the risk of spreading illness at your prime location. Identify jobs that can be completed remotely and assist employees in setting up home offices when appropriate.

Employee: If your job duties can be completed remotely, prepare your home. Identify a good place to set up your office. Be sure you have the network and telephone access you'll need. Tell your family your schedule might change and how that may affect them.

Stay Informed

While lethal bird flu has been noted overseas, there is still the threat of illness from the virus in other parts of the world. The World Health Organization provides complete information about the evolving situation on its Web site: http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers a [free email subscription service](#), which allows CDC.gov users to receive notifications by e-mail when new information is available. With a subscription profile, you get the updated information on the items of interest to you automatically without having to return to the website and check for changes.

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New Guidance for Workplaces from Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

On February 6, OSHA released new guidance on preparing workplaces for an influenza pandemic. [Learn more here.](#)

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Seasonal Flu Reminder

Seasonal flu viruses are unpredictable and can peak as late as March in Ohio. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides a weekly update on flu activity on its Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/usmap.htm>

Form healthy habits to protect your self from seasonal flu viruses. Good health habits include:

- Eating a balanced diet including plenty of vegetables, fruits and whole-grain products.
- Drinking plenty of water and going easy on salt, sugar, alcohol and saturated fat.
- Exercising regularly. Thirty or more minutes of physical activity most days of the week can help boost your immunity.
- Getting plenty of rest. Sleep is shown to help your body fight off illness.
- Washing your hands thoroughly and often, especially before eating or cooking and after using the restroom. Use soap and water and scrub for 20 seconds.
- Trying not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread this way.
- Staying away from people who are sick as much as you can.
- Staying home from work or school if you are sick.

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Web Site Highlights

If you haven't discovered the [publication library](#) yet, check it out. All publications are listed on this page for download, some with areas you can customize for your employees. All of these documents are public and free for you to use in your business.

A page has been created that offers documents in Spanish and links to sites providing health and pandemic flu information [in Spanish.](#)

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