



OHIO PANDEMIC FLU

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Best Practices

Send your best practices to [Sara Morman](#).

Editors

Moriah Needham
 Ohio Department of Health
 614-644-8562
 *Business
 *School

Sara Morman
 Ohio Department of Health
 614-644-8562
 *Local Government

How local governments - small and large - are preparing**Winter Flu Approaches**

With the height of winter flu season approaching, some may wonder about the many differences between seasonal and pandemic flu. Seasonal flu follows predictable patterns usually occurring in the winter; a pandemic can happen at any time during the year and occurs rarely. During the winter flu season, the very young, elderly and those with certain underlying health conditions are at increased risk for serious complications; during a pandemic healthy people may be at increased risk for serious complications.

[Click here](#) for more information on the differences between seasonal and pandemic flu.

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Flu Shot Offers Best Protection Against Seasonal Flu

There is no pandemic flu at this time, but seasonal flu viruses still pose a threat. A flu shot would not protect you against a new flu virus that may cause an influenza pandemic, but it will help you fight off seasonal flu.

Some people, such as older people, young children and people with certain chronic health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications. Nationwide, seasonal flu and its complications cause some 36,000 deaths and 200,000 hospitalizations annually, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The best way to protect against seasonal flu is to get a vaccination each fall. The flu shot is a vaccine that provides protection against the flu and is given by needle in the arm. The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. The nasal-spray flu vaccine contains attenuated (weakened) live viruses and is administered by nasal sprayer to healthy people aged five to 49 years.

Testing has shown that both the flu shot and the nasal-spray vaccine are effective at preventing the flu.

The ability of flu vaccine to protect a person depends on the age and health status of the person getting the vaccine and the similarity or "match" between the virus strains in the vaccine and those in circulation.

October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but you can still get vaccinated in December and later. Flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as May. A seasonal flu shot is not effective against a pandemic flu virus, but it may help keep your body stay healthy.

Limiting your exposure to the virus and practicing healthy habits are two ways to protect yourself and loved ones from a flu virus – seasonal or pandemic.

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.



*Communities

Article submissions

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

- Washing your hands thoroughly and often, especially before eating or cooking. 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 if you are sick.

Contact your doctor's office, employer, local health department or a retailer to obtain a flu shot.



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Pandemic flu plans

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

Best Practice - Franklin County Board of Health and Columbus City Health Department

The Franklin County Board of Health and Columbus City Public Health Department partnered with more than 30 agencies to form the Central Ohio Public Information Network for Pan Flu (COPIN). The group has met for several months to plan and prepare for an influenza pandemic. COPIN is broken up into four committees including the Health Alert Network, Hotline, Joint Information Center Logistics and Message Development.

The Health Alert Network committee is building a database of stakeholder contacts that will receive regular e-mail updates regarding pandemic flu. The e-mails will help keep all stakeholders informed quickly and effectively. Faxes and phone calls will be available as back-up systems.

The Hotline committee developed a phone hotline for the public to call during a pandemic to have medical and general questions answered. The hotline was developed to minimize non-emergency calls made to 911 and utilizes existing systems in the community.

The Joint Information Center (JIC) Logistics committee is identifying and gathering all needed materials for Franklin County's JIC. The JIC is a central location from which all agencies involved in planning can work to ensure unified action and consistent information. They are also planning for the possibility of virtual electronically-based JIC and media briefings.

The Message Development committee coordinates most written communication required for COPIN's pandemic flu planning. This committee writes news releases, fliers and brochures used to inform the public on how to prepare for pandemic flu.

In addition to the work of these committees, COPIN is creating a Web site specifically for pandemic flu planning in Columbus and Franklin County.

If you would like more information on what the Franklin County Board of Health is doing to prepare for a pandemic flu contact [Kim Smith](#).

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Best Practice - Canfield Township and City of Canfield

Canfield Township and the City of Canfield formed a joint partnership to plan for an influenza pandemic. The committee is comprised of representatives from the Cardinal Joint Fire District; the City Of Canfield police and manager's office; Canfield Township trustees and police; local emergency management agency; and the Canfield school superintendent.

Planning began by considering what would be most needed for the small township and city of about 14,000 to efficiently care for sick people. Planning is in its early stages and the committee has identified a few needs, including: a staging area for sick people, temporary morgue locations and emergency generators.

The committee is also brainstorming ways to promote emergency preparedness to residents by partnering with grocery stores, schools and utility companies. They are also distributing a disaster preparedness guide to their community.

If you have questions on how Canfield Township and the City of Canfield are preparing pandemic flu contact [Chief Robert Tieche](#).

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Best Practice - Fairfield County

One of the actions Ohioans can take to prepare for emergencies including an influenza pandemic is to stock up on food, water, medicines and emergency supplies. The Fairfield Department of Health this year dedicated its county fair booth to emergency preparedness. They gave away more than 3,500 preparedness packets and displayed a two-week



supply of groceries and supplies, raffling it off to residents who participated in an awareness survey. Kroger stores in Fairfield County donated the goods for the raffle.

[Click here](#) to view Fairfield County's action plan.

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Planning for a Potential Influenza Pandemic Continues

If 40 percent of state employees are home sick or caring for sick family members during an influenza pandemic, how will the State of Ohio function? That's what state agencies are currently planning for.

While continuity of operations plans have been in place at the state for some time, these traditional plans assume state facilities are unavailable. Continuity of operations for a pandemic considers something else, the likely reduction in the number of employees available.

Several state agencies recently completed plans outlining their response to an influenza pandemic earlier this year. Now, all state agencies are working together to assure minimum essential functions continue in their respective agencies.

In late March, Governor Bob Taft issued a cabinet advisory asking state agencies to develop continuity of operations plans specific to a pandemic. Once agency plans were reviewed, an executive order was issued in August establishing the Pandemic Influenza State Services Advisory Council (PISSAC).

The council, comprised of representatives from the Governor's and Attorney General's offices and the departments of Administrative Services, Health, Budget and Management and Public Safety, provided additional guidance for state agencies to address in the plans.

The overall goal of the pandemic flu continuity of operations plans is to ensure delivery of essential services. State agencies are identifying essential and non-essential roles for employees. Employees not working on essential functions may be designated to act in common support duties to fulfill the state mission.

The PISSAC is responsible for overseeing and coordinating state agency pandemic influenza continuity of operations plans. Plans are currently undergoing a second review and will be revised as needed. In the future, PISSAC will consider what if any legislative changes need to be considered and will begin exercising state agency plans.

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Protecting Special Needs Populations During a Pandemic

During a pandemic, supply chains may break down, access to outpatient medical treatments may be limited and hospitals likely will reach full capacity quickly. For Ohioans with physical, medical or mental disabilities, emergencies present unique challenges.

Special Needs Planning for Organizations

Organizations working with special needs populations should plan now to continue providing supplies and services during a pandemic. Protecting vulnerable special needs populations during a pandemic requires careful planning.

A first step in planning for special needs populations during a pandemic is to identify those who may receive services or supplies through your organization. Second, work with local disability organizations to identify clusters of people with disabilities. Finally, prepare a voluntary special needs registry if you do not yet have one for your organization. A registry is a listing of people who meet specified criteria who may need assistance during a potential pandemic.

Special Needs Planning for People With Disabilities

Individual preparedness can also help keep people with disabilities safe during an emergency. Planning ahead provides the best protection when disaster strikes.

First, create a personal support network, or if you know someone who has special needs, offer to be a part of their network. Second, complete a personal assessment. [Click here](#) for a personal assessment questionnaire.

Be sure to discuss emergency plans with family, friends, personal care attendants and anyone

else in your support network.

Resources

Representatives from the Ohio departments of Aging, Health and Job & Family Services are working together on a special needs workgroup as part of the Ohio Department of Health's Pandemic Flu Planning Task Force. If you have information you would like to share with this work group contact [James Bryant, M.D.](#)

To begin preparing, more information is available on the [National Organization on Disability](#) and [American Red Cross](#) Web sites.

Portions of this article were taken from the National Organization on Disability and the American Red Cross Web sites.

[Click here](#) for more complete information about planning for people with disabilities.

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An Introduction to Incident Command System

When disaster strikes, it's important that responders efficiently communicate and organize their activities. One of the methods to do that is to utilize Incident Command System (ICS). Here's some background on ICS and why organizations such as the State of Ohio, emergency management agencies, most emergency responders and many others utilize it during emergency situations.

ICS is a structure used to respond to events; most often they are unplanned such as fires, floods or disease outbreaks. It can, however, be used during planned events if need be. Think of it as a standardized way to manage staff and resources.

ICS is used in the United States and other countries to organize responses and was designed to meet these four challenges:

- Meet the response needs of incidents of any kind or size.
- Allow personnel from a variety of agencies to meld rapidly into a common management structure.
- Provide logistical and administrative support to operational staff.
- Be cost effective by avoiding duplication of efforts.

ICS can be scaled to any size and applied to a wide range of incidents. Examples include:

- Fire, both structural and wildland.
- Medical, when there are multiple patients.
- Inter-agency, where different agencies must work together.
- Natural disasters such as tornadoes, floods, ice storms or earthquakes.
- Human, animal and plant disease outbreaks (*such as a flu pandemic*).
- Search and rescue missions.
- Hazardous materials incidents.
- Criminal acts and crime scene investigations.
- Terrorist incidents including the use of weapons of mass destruction.
- National Special Security Events such as presidential visits or the Super Bowl.
- Other planned events such as parades or demonstrations.

Given the magnitude of these events, it's not always possible for any one agency to handle the management and resource needs. Partnerships are often required among local, state, tribal and federal agencies. These partners must work together in a smooth, coordinated effort under the same management system. ICS is that standardized, on-scene, all-hazard incident management concept.

ICS allows users to adopt an integrated organizational structure to match the complexities and demands of single incident or multiple incidents without being hindered by jurisdictional boundaries. This flexibility makes it a very cost effective and efficient management approach for both small and large situations.

ICS consists of procedures for controlling personnel, facilities, equipment and communications. It is a system designed to be used or applied from the time an incident occurs until the requirement for integrated management and operations no longer exists.

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Ohio Exercises Communications Plans

Although public health scientists and researchers are confident a new strain of influenza will one day lead to a pandemic one day, the exact timing and circumstances won't be known until the event is upon us. A

proactive effort to share information with the public is part of the foundation of the national strategy. In Ohio, active planning, training and exercises to test those plans have been underway for months.

There are several types of exercises, but most are either "tabletop" or "functional." A tabletop exercise involves participants discussing what action steps are in their plans. Tabletop exercises provide readiness to conduct a functional exercise, in which participants actually perform the activities called for in their plans.



Jay Carey, ODH Director of Public Affairs; Jane Beathard, Ohio Department of Natural Resources Director of Communications; Kristopher Weiss, ODH Public Information Officer and LeeAnne Mizer, Ohio Department of Agriculture Public Information Officer discuss the exercise scenario and make final changes to a news release.

For instance, communications plans typically provide reasons for and steps on how to conduct news conferences. In a tabletop exercise, participants would be given a scenario and asked what would or should be done in this circumstance. They would explain and discuss their procedure and thought processes about the need for a news conference. In a functional exercise given the same scenario, participants would go through the preparations of conducting a news conference.

Held Sept. 28, 2006, at the Ohio Emergency Management Agency, one recent functional exercise involved some 50 communications staff from government agencies including the Ohio Department of Health. The scenario for the exercise highlighted the hours surrounding the first public announcement of lab results confirming the dangerous strain of the H5N1 (bird flu) virus in the state.

In this communications exercise, participants were given a highly compressed timeframe to recognize the need for a news conference; prepare for one; and conduct it according to existing guidelines.

Why is this important?

During a crisis, information is crucial - not just for those responding to the emergency but for each resident in the affected area. Sharing accurate and timely information is the key mission of communications professionals, especially during a crisis.

Exercises are one step in a continuing program of training. Following the event, participants provided their observations and feedback. Later, exercise evaluators met to review their observations. Exercises are designed to test particular items in a plan and evaluators provide their feedback as to how well that was accomplished.

Then an after-action report summarizes all observations and comments. This report becomes the basis for corrective actions that may include revising plans; small-scale drills to test one aspect of a response or additional training.

These efforts by communications staff in public health and other response agencies are one part of a larger response in place when an influenza pandemic or other public health emergency occurs.

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Web Site Highlights

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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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