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Best Practices

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How local governments are preparing for a pandemic

Best Practice - Toledo-Lucas County Health Department

The [Toledo-Lucas County Health Department](#) has been working to raise awareness of a potential pandemic influenza since late 2005. The Toledo-Lucas County Health Department utilized the <http://ohiopandemicflu.gov> Web site to identify local planning partners.

Throughout the summer months, the department held seminars for institutes of higher education, hospitals, first responders, schools and church groups informing them of the potential for an influenza pandemic. The department created information packets with specific items for each audience. The health department staff also partnered with the University of Toledo to draft a specialized plan for area businesses. The business plan contains suggested pandemic influenza preparedness activities.

Raising awareness of an influenza pandemic among residents has also been a priority for the Toledo-Lucas County Health Department with the Wash Up, Stock Up and Listen Up campaign. Launched in July 2006, the campaign includes posters, billboards, credit-card-size supply lists, magnets, pens and television ads. The department used innovative distribution methods such as requesting its Division of Environmental Health to ask businesses undergoing an inspection to display the posters.

The Toledo-Lucas County Health Department distributed a family activity card (link to PDF) supplied by the Ohio Department of Health to schools and businesses and e-mailed it to city and county employees. They also continue to work to raise awareness of pandemic flu by speaking to various communities about the disease and how to prepare. They have drawn on various community resources such as the local chapters of the Area Office on Aging and American Red Cross as well as private residents to determine the best methods of distributing materials and information.

Future projects include a community volunteer management program – which is in pilot stage – and an informational pandemic flu summit tentatively scheduled for March.

If you would like more information on preparedness efforts in Lucas County, contact Eric Zgodzinski at (419) 213-4166.

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Best Practice - 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

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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.

Local agencies who participated from Lake County include: the Lake County Emergency Management Agency, Department of Utilities, Geographic Information System Department, Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities and the Planning Commission.

The Geauga County Emergency Management Agency as well as the Leroy, Mentor, Munson, Kirtland and Concord Fire Departments also participated.

Public Health and Health Care Providers who participated include: Cleveland Department of Public Health, Geauga County Health District, Conneaut Health Department, Center for Health Affairs, Euclid General Hospital, Lake Hospital System and Hospice of the Western Reserve.

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.

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Plan Now for an Influenza Pandemic

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

Article submissions

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

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.

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.

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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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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 Web site and check for changes.

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