

Autumn 2006

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## Be Prepared - Ohio Planning for a Flu Pandemic

### 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.

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

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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

Send your best practices to:  
**Editors**

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\*Nonprofit

- 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. 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.



**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.

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**Groceries and Government Partner to Help Prepare Communities**



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.

Meanwhile, a statewide effort to assist grocers in planning for an influenza pandemic was undertaken by the Ohio Food Industry Foundation (OFIF) in partnership with the Ohio Department of Health (ODH). OFIF worked with the food safety team at ODH to author the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Guide for Retail Food Establishments, which was distributed to more than 14,000 retail food establishments.

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**Best Practices - Ohio Community Service Council**

Few things will affect volunteer organizations the way an influenza pandemic would. During an influenza pandemic, there will likely be fewer volunteers available because many will be home sick or caring for sick loved ones.

One organization is taking the lead on two fronts: the Ohio Community Service Council (OCSC) is working to raise awareness among volunteers and recruit medical personnel before a pandemic strikes. OCSC is a state agency supporting several different volunteer programs around the state.

**OCSC Works to Build Medical Reserve Corp**

Part of OCSC pandemic planning includes increased recruitment for and development of the Ohio Medical Reserve Corps (OMRC) program throughout the state. The OMRC establishes teams of local licensed volunteer medical and public health professionals who can contribute during emergencies.

To date, OCSC has OMRC units to cover more than half the counties in Ohio. OMRC volunteers also offer education and prevention services to improve the public health infrastructure in their neighborhoods.

Members are pre-identified and willing to respond to an Ohio disaster to aid in quicker and more efficient response. The OMRC is designed to track the response of credentialed volunteers for emergency relief and to facilitate state and regional planning efforts for deployment of volunteers.

**Joining the OMRC**

- Register at the [Ohio Medical Reserve Corps Web site](#).
- Complete an OMRC training course; OMRC credentialing will be completed as part of the registration process. The Web site above can provide training information and schedules.
- Verification of professional license will be made by Ohio Citizen Corps.
- Contact [David O'Reilly](#), (614) 995-1849 or [Paul Bender](#), (614) 728-5177 for more information.

### **OCSC Works to Train Volunteer Base**

There are four volunteer centers around the state and all are working from one plan to prepare Ohio for a potential pandemic flu. These volunteer centers are run by the Ohio Citizen Corp Council, a program of OCSC.

The lead volunteer centers are providing technical assistance to for OMRC development and include United Way of Greater Toledo in the northwest; Mahoning County Volunteer Services in the northeast; First Link in central and southwestern Ohio; and Gallia-Jackson-Vinton RSVP and Volunteer Network Center in the southeast.

In planning for an influenza pandemic the Gallia-Jackson-Vinton RSVP and Volunteer Network Center has been busy raising awareness, training OMRC volunteers and setting up volunteer reception centers. The lead volunteer centers are also working with representatives from local health departments, emergency management agencies and other volunteer organizations around the state.

### **OMRC Training**

Many volunteers are needed to make the OMRC operational and lead volunteer centers are providing training for medical and support personnel. Some activities include registering and credentialing medical personnel, registering volunteers and educating both groups on prevention of flu and personal protective equipment.

The Gallia-Jackson-Vinton RSVP and Volunteer Network Center has also considered ways to make it easier for Ohioans to volunteer. During a pandemic, schools may be closed and large gatherings may be cancelled for a time to slow the spread of flu.

The center is considering ways to provide child care for volunteers who may not have other ways to care for their children should a pandemic occur. The center will also register child care providers and conduct background checks before a pandemic to ensure children are safe. Providing child care will aid in volunteer retention.

### **Volunteer Reception Centers**

Each of the lead volunteer centers is providing training to set up volunteer reception centers in each county. A volunteer reception center is a location set up during an emergency to manage donated supplies and the flow of volunteers by interviewing, volunteering and referring them to areas where their skills are most needed.

The centers are urging counties to identify needed resources and are working to bring those resources together into one point of contact, the volunteer reception center.

According to the Gallia-Jackson-Vinton RSVP and Volunteer Network Center, volunteer reception centers need 20 to 30 people to run well. Volunteer reception centers include emergency volunteers and social service organizations which provide support for first responders. Each lead volunteer center is conducting trainings on how to set up and run volunteer centers for their area of the state.

Volunteer reception centers will also act as a safety net to identify any volunteers with a medical license who may not yet be signed up with the OMRC.

### **Community summits**

The Gallia-Jackson-Vinton RSVP and Volunteer Network Center is working to raise awareness of pandemic flu in the community. Through community summits, the center has reached out to several different audiences to educate them about the possible disruptions a pandemic flu may cause.

During community summits, they have met with members of the banking industry, restaurants, different levels of local government, members of the newspaper industries, social service agencies, local business owners, plant operators and local community colleges.

During community summits, participants are provided with resources to begin planning for a pandemic.

[Click here](#) for more information on OCSC activities.

## Best Practices - Columbus School for Girls

The Columbus School for Girls (CSG), a private school in Bexley, this summer began planning for a potential influenza pandemic. Recognizing that preparations for a pandemic were similar to planning for any disaster, they instructed their Crisis and Safety team to include pandemics in their school emergency plan and complete the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) checklist for schools (available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)). As the team worked through the HHS plan, they developed a CSG-specific checklist for the team to follow. Below is a sample of the checklists. [Click here to view the entire checklist comparison](#). This provides a good example of how to tailor others' plans to the specific needs of your school district. Details of coordination and tasks may vary for public schools as well as between rural and city school districts.

U.S. HHS Checklist	CSG Checklist
<b>Planning and Coordination</b>	
As part of the district's crisis management plan, address pandemic influenza preparedness, involving all relevant stakeholders in the district (e.g., lead emergency response agency, district administrators, local public health representatives, school health and mental health professionals, teachers, food services director, and parent representatives). This committee is accountable for articulating strategic priorities and overseeing the development of the district's operational pandemic plan.	<p>Convene Crisis Team/Safety to plan operations and include parents in meetings as needed.</p> <p>Address premise that the impact of an emergency would possibly influence our program in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interruption of classes due to school closings</li> <li>● Receipt of food deliveries</li> <li>● Absences of faculty and staff due to illness</li> <li>● Interruption of transportation</li> </ul> <p>Encourage parents to have a plan for identifying childcare if school is closed during an emergency. Give them ideas where they might seek help. Since we would not close unless mandated in the case of a pandemic that would mean all childcare facilities would be closed. Parents would have to rely on friends and family if businesses remained open or they would have to work from home.</p>
Implement an exercise/drill to test your pandemic plan and revise it periodically	<p>Stage practice drills to test our plan, and then revise it if needed.</p> <p>Perform a self-assessment of our services and triage essential services for a variety of hazard events.</p>
<b>Student Learning and Program Operations</b>	
Develop scenarios describing the potential impact of a pandemic on student learning (e.g., student and staff absences), school closings, and extracurricular activities based on having various levels of illness among students and staff.	Develop plans that are in response to school closing, faculty and staff illness, and gaps in student learning due to emergencies by providing distance learning for students through computer technology, utilizing online software, such as Moodle.
Develop alternative procedures to assure continuity of instruction (e.g., web-based distance instruction, telephone trees, mailed lessons and assignments, instruction via local radio or television stations) in the event of district school closures.	Involve parents in the learning process by communicating our plan to continue learning and instruct through technology.
<b>Infection Control Policies and Actions</b>	
Work with the local health department to implement effective infection prevention policies and procedures that help limit the spread of influenza at schools in the district (e.g. promotion of hand hygiene, cough/sneeze etiquette). Make good hygiene a habit now in order to help protect children from many infectious diseases such as flu.	<p>Communicate to faculty, staff, students, and parents about how to limit the spread of infection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase handwashing</li> <li>● Cover the mouth when coughing or sneezing</li> <li>● Clean toys frequently</li> </ul>
Provide sufficient and accessible infection prevention supplies (e.g., soap, alcohol-based/waterless hand hygiene products, tissues and receptacles for their disposal).	<p>Inventory an ample supply of items needed to control the spread of infection, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hand soap</li> <li>● Paper towels</li> <li>● Tissues</li> <li>● Alcohol-based hand sanitizer</li> </ul>

<b>Communication Plan</b>	
Assess readiness to meet communication needs in preparation for an influenza pandemic, including regular review, testing, and updating of communication plans.	Communicate the flu pandemic plan with faculty, staff, students, and parents and explain why we have the plan and give people an opportunity to make comments and ask questions.
Anticipate the potential fear and anxiety of staff, students, and families as a result of rumors and misinformation and plan communications accordingly.	School counselor serves on crisis team.

### **Planning Partners and Tools**

CSG has a crisis team consisting of representatives from all areas of school administration - head of school, associate head of school, director of business and finance, division directors (elementary, middle and upper school principals), school nurse, athletic director, technology coordinator, counselors and maintenance supervisors. This crisis team responds to any school emergency and is provided with a process outline and contact list to carry. Download a Microsoft Word version of the [business card template](#) or a [larger template](#) you can shrink to fit into your own format.

### **Meeting Student Learning Objectives**

To continue meeting student learning objectives during a flu pandemic, CSG developed plans for responding to several scenarios: school closing, faculty and staff illness and distance learning. They recognized involving parents in the planning process was crucial so households could be prepared with the technology and resources needed for future at-home lessons. CSG is utilizing Moodle, a free, open-source course management system. [Click here to learn more.](#)

### **Key Messages and Supplies**

In the event of a pandemic, preventive actions could lessen the impact of the flu on the school. CSG has identified three key messages for faculty, staff, students and parents: increase hand washing; cover mouth when coughing and sneezing; and clean toys frequently. CSG also is building an inventory of items needed to control infection such as paper towels, soap and tissues.

### **Seasonal Flu Shots for Faculty, Parents and Students**

In creating their pandemic flu plan and discussing the implications of a flu pandemic as well as Ohio's seasonal flu, CSG decided as a public health measure to invite parents and students to receive flu shots when the school nurse vaccinates faculty and staff.

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### **Best Practices - Case Western Reserve University**

Case Western Reserve University has been planning for a pandemic for more than a year. They have formed a [committee](#), started the [HHS checklist](#), completed a [response plan](#), developed a [Web site](#) and hosted a [community planning conference](#) on Sept. 6, 2006.

Lynn Singer, deputy provost and vice president for academic programs at Case, invited members of the Case faculty, staff and students, as well as government, community and health care officials to the September conference. Interested members of the public also were invited. Attendees included representatives from all areas of the community. Streaming video of the conference is available online. The webcast is 1 ½ hours long. [Click here to view.](#)

Having the support and direction of the deputy was invaluable to the committee. They were better able to bring together representatives from all disciplines and levels at Case to meet a common goal.

### **Case Utilizes Incident Command System**

Because a flu pandemic would have severe health implications, Case assigned the role of incident commander to the director of the University Health Service (UHS). UHS at Case is staffed by several professionals including physicians, nurse practitioners, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and registered nurses. On average, UHS serves 12,000 to 13,000 people annually at their full-service facility. With a normal volume of that magnitude, Case is starting to think about how best to utilize existing capacity as well as how to gather additional capacity to assist the students, faculty and community during a pandemic.

### **University Health Services**

Some of the capabilities and resources being further developed by UHS to assist in the response to a pandemic are as follows:

- Plan to maintain UHS's capacity to provide substantial health services to the Case community.

- Educate Case community on pandemic influenza symptoms and treatments available on campus to avoid undue strain on local emergency rooms. Part of this effort includes guidelines for when to seek medical care.
- Develop protocols for isolation and infection control for a flu pandemic.
- Consider temporary relocation of well care to another facility to accommodate surge of flu patients and protect the health of non-exposed individuals. Of particular concern to Case is the health and safety of pregnant women being served by the UHS Women's Center.
- Create broader remote access to electronic medical records for Case health practitioners. This could enable "telephone triage" by Case nurses and facilitate moving patients to facilities to accommodate surge.
- Consider other campus locations that could increase capacity to meet surge demands such as physical education facilities.

Case UHS also is utilizing guidelines and resources from the American College Health Association (ACHA). [Click here](#) to learn more about ACHA pandemic flu guidelines.

### **Lessons Learned**

As with all planning processes, Case incorporated lessons learned from others and their own committee.

"Having watched Katrina, we know we can't wait for a disaster, we have to plan now," said Eleanor Davidson, director of UHS and incident commander for a flu pandemic.

The committee, representing a diverse cross section of the university, came to agree planning for a flu pandemic is not solely a health matter. Planning for a pandemic is an important part of the university's business plan.

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### **Planning Resources for Ohio Schools**

Case and CSG have both provided solid planning examples for Ohio schools. One example they provide is to utilize existing resources within your school network. The following are links to associations and organizations that offer helpful information on planning for a flu pandemic or other emergency.

#### **K - 12 Schools**

- [Ohio Department of Education](#)
- [The Ohio Resource Network \(ORN\) for Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities](#)
- \*\* [Download the ORN emergency plan template](#)

#### **Colleges and Universities**

- [Association of Independent Colleges & Universities of Ohio](#)
- [American College Health Association](#)

### **Printed Materials Available**

The Ohio Department of Health also has a number of planning brochures for families available free of charge to support local planning efforts. [Click here to see a PDF](#). If you would like brochures for distribution, [send us an e-mail](#) with the number of boxes (350 brochures per box) desired and your shipping address.

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### **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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### **An Introduction to Incident Command System**

You may have noticed Case mentions using the Incident Command Systems (ICS) in their response to a pandemic. But did you notice the mention of ICS in the HHS checklists as well? Here's some background on ICS and why organizations such as Case, the State of Ohio, 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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### **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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### **Ohio Plans for Business Continuity**

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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## 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**

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 schools.

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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