

Winter 2007

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Working Together - Ohio Schools Planning for Flu Pandemic

State Agencies Exercise Plans and Provide Assistance to Ohio Schools

On February 1, fourteen state agencies and organizations participated in a tabletop exercise designed to test the statewide response to school closure in the event of a flu pandemic event. The key objectives of the exercise were to increase understanding of the responsibilities of all participating agencies; identify gaps in coordination between agencies; promote continued planning and refinement of current plans and promote understanding of inter-related decisions and related results. Representatives from the following organizations participated.

- [Ohio Department of Health \(ODH\)](#)
- [Ohio Department of Education \(ODE\)](#)
- [Ohio Department of Mental Health](#)
- [Ohio Emergency Management Agency](#)
- [Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police](#)
- [Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators](#)
- [Ohio School Boards Association](#)
- [Ohio Education Association](#)
- [Ohio Federation of Teachers](#)
- [Ohio Association of School Business Officials](#)
- [Association of Ohio Health Commissioners](#)
- [Ohio Resource Network](#)
- [Ohio Head Start Organization](#)
- [Ohio Department of Job and Family Services](#)
- Regional/Local Health Department Representatives
- Local EMA and School Representatives

Newsletters available

[Business School Community Organizations Local Government Combined Newsletter](#)

Send your best practices to:
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Late in 2006, ODH and ODE along with the Ohio Department of Mental Health, Ohio Psychiatric Association, Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators and two Columbus schools presented a half-day pandemic flu planning workshop at the Ohio Prevention and Education Conference. The workshop provided attendees an overview of pandemic influenza, planning implications for schools and mental health concerns. A panel discussion rounded out the offerings as well as a preview of the *Pandemic Influenza Toolkit for Ohio Schools*.

The *Pandemic Influenza Toolkit for Ohio Schools* will be distributed to superintendents and local health districts later this month. Prepared by ODH with contributions by numerous state and local agencies and organizations, the toolkit contains school planning information, guidance on disease surveillance and reporting, infection control measures, sample media releases and more. Look for a copy to arrive at your school district office soon. Additional copies can be downloaded from the www.ohiopandemicflu.gov website.

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Best Practices - Bloom-Carroll Schools

To prepare Bloom-Carroll Schools for a potential pandemic, Prevention Coordinator Eric Landversicht has taken steps to educate the school board and district employees and worked with several state agencies to augment the district's and county's planning efforts.

"I found that planning works better when you can bring all the disciplines to the table," Landversicht said of his approach.

Landversicht represents Fairfield County's schools in an infectious disease planning group for the local [Emergency Management Agency \(EMA\)](#). This group is developing an infectious

*Faith-based
*Nonprofit

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.

disease annex for the county's emergency operations plan. They discuss how to best manage resources during outbreaks. For example, they have identified shelters, clinics and morgue resources in their county that can be used during a pandemic and will work with EMA and [Red Cross](#) in the event the school facilities are needed. They have also included law enforcement, agriculture and public safety organizations in their planning efforts.

"In working on our district plan it occurred to me we could streamline the planning process for the schools, emergency responders and EMA if we worked as a team to develop one plan that each school district would incorporate into their existing crisis plan. This could help relieve the strain on local resources and ensure all schools in the county are working in unison during a pandemic," Landversicht said.

Fairfield County's plan establishes a consistent process for monitoring symptoms and reporting absenteeism to the local health department and creates a close working relationship with the health commissioner. This will assist the county in making the decision when and how to close schools during a pandemic. Their plan also addresses infection control and education of parents and families in the community.

Along with Merrilee Taylor, emergency response coordinator at the [Fairfield Department of Health](#), Landversicht arranged for a presentation to county superintendents by the local health department in January, timed to coincide with the release of the ODH [Pandemic Influenza Toolkit for Ohio Schools](#). They provided information about avian flu, flu pandemics and other types of infectious disease events.

In February, Landversicht will participate in a regional pandemic flu functional exercise and plans to use that experience to help develop a coordinated school response. He is also inviting local Christian and private schools to participate in the development of the single county plan for schools. The final plan will be reviewed by all superintendents, the county health department and the EMA before being adopted by schools.

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Best Practices - Incarnation Catholic School *Submitted by Ann Woeste, RN, school nurse*

At [Incarnation Catholic School](#) in Centerville, Ohio, we have made a conscious decision to quickly begin planning to prepare for a communicable disease outbreak.

In October 2006, we had a planning session and developed an informational program to present to all faculty. Our goals were simple:

1. Have a plan in place for a communicable disease outbreak in our community.
2. Continue the learning process for all students.
3. Deliver factual, easy-to-read, informational material to families, staff and community as needed.

The plan included our main school goal - to provide a healthy environment in which to learn and grow. We then defined our objectives:

1. Implementing our plan when a pandemic occurs.
2. Developing an online learning system to ensure the continuity of learning during community crisis.
3. Creating fact sheets and informational letters to distribute to families.
4. Establishing criteria to minimize contact between people to prevent the spread of disease (AKA limitation of movement).

In our presentation, we defined epidemics and pandemics and the primary strategies for preventing pandemic influenza. Health precautions were stressed such as washing hands, cough etiquette and getting a vaccination when it becomes available. We included discussion on the needed emotional support during any time of crisis.

Our administration was supportive in our goals to ensure after-school activities would be cancelled to help slow the spread of the virus. They also guided us through developing online learning through e-mail and our "homework hotline." Our phone chain was updated and distributed to all faculty members.

The in-service for our faculty members was very useful and facilitated many questions and great discussions. I am sure the faculty members are more aware now of the potential risks and the continuing chain of events that will occur if a pandemic does surface.

We continue to have ongoing discussions and are still actively working on the development of

the forms specific to our school that we want to be available. Our plan will continue to be a work in progress. We continue to use available community resources and closely monitor what the local and state health departments are preparing.

Because of my frequent calls with questions to our local health department, I am included in a planning committee for the Combined Health District of Montgomery County to educate our school staff on pandemic flu (under the direction of Kathy Blossom our public health emergency preparedness educator). It is a great networking system providing information about what other area schools are doing.

In this month's parent newsletter, we included an article about the potential for a flu pandemic and shared our goals. We provided parents information about health precautions encouraged at school and a reminder of when to keep children home. Our policy states that if a child is experiencing any of the following within the last 24 hours, they should be kept home to recover; temperature of 100 degrees or higher, vomiting, diarrhea, persistent cough or excessive fatigue. We ended the article with this statement, "Proper rest, nutrition, exercise and frequent hand washing will keep our students healthy and ready to learn. Keep covering those coughs and washing those hands."

It is hoped as we continue to develop our plan for a communicable disease outbreak we will all learn valuable information. As we meet and discuss possible scenarios, we know we have much to learn. We also know we have much to gain as we work together as a community. Writing our plan and serving on the community committee has shown people working together can accomplish anything.

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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 school community were Cleveland State University, Lakeland Community College, Mentor Public School System and Ohio State University Extension.

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>.

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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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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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.

Planning Resources for Ohio Schools

Printed Materials Available

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

Pandemic Influenza Toolkit for Ohio Schools

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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](#).

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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Files require [Windows Media Player 10](#)

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