

PANDEMIC INFLUENZA PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR MEDICAL RESERVE CORPS UNITS

What can Medical Reserve Corps units do to prepare for an influenza pandemic?

Planning for pandemic influenza is critical for Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) units. The following guidance identifies important, specific activities MRC units can do now to prepare for such an event. Many activities are specific to pandemic influenza, but a number also pertain to any public health or other emergency. This guidance is adapted from the *State and Local Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist* developed by HHS and found on the federal government's pandemic influenza website (www.pandemicflu.gov). It also includes relevant elements from the *Business Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist* and *Faith-Based & Community Organizations Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Checklist*, also from HHS and available at the aforementioned website.

This guidance is not intended to set forth mandatory requirements for MRC units. Rather, each MRC unit should determine for itself whether it is adequately prepared for disease outbreaks in accordance with the laws, plans and procedures of its local jurisdiction and state. In addition, many of the actions listed below may not be applicable to all MRC units. Pandemic influenza planning and response actions will be MRC unit- and community-specific. MRC units should engage in pandemic influenza planning and response actions which are within the purview, scope, training and capabilities of the unit and the community which it serves.

What is an influenza pandemic?

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which there is little or no immunity in the human population. The disease spreads easily person-to-person, causes serious illness, and can sweep across the country and around the world.

Historically, the 20th century saw three influenza pandemics:

- 1918 influenza pandemic caused at least 500,000 U.S. deaths and up to 40 million deaths worldwide.
- 1957 influenza pandemic caused at least 70,000 U.S. deaths and 1-2 million deaths worldwide.
- 1968 influenza pandemic caused about 34,000 U.S. deaths and 700,000 deaths worldwide.

Characteristics and challenges of a pandemic:

- *Rapid Worldwide Spread*
 - When a pandemic influenza virus emerges, its global spread is considered inevitable.

- Preparedness activities should assume that the entire world population would be susceptible.
- Countries might, through measures such as border closures and travel restrictions, delay arrival of the virus, but cannot stop it.
- *Health Care Systems Overloaded*
 - Most people have little or no immunity to a pandemic virus. Infection and illness rates may soar. A substantial percentage of the world's population will likely require some form of medical care.
 - Nations are unlikely to have the staff, facilities, equipment and hospital beds needed to cope with large numbers of people who suddenly fall ill.
 - Death rates may be high, and may be largely determined by four factors: (1) the number of people who become infected; (2) the virulence of the virus; (3) the underlying characteristics and vulnerability of affected populations; and (4) the degree of effectiveness of preventive measures.
 - Past pandemics have spread globally in two and sometimes three waves.
- *Medical Supplies Inadequate*
 - The need for vaccine is likely to outstrip supply.
 - The need for antiviral drugs is also likely to be inadequate early in a pandemic.
 - A pandemic can create a shortage of hospital beds, ventilators and other supplies. Surge capacity at non-traditional sites such as schools may be created to cope with demand.
 - Difficult decisions will need to be made regarding who gets antiviral drugs and vaccines.
- *Economic and Social Disruption*
 - Travel bans, closings of schools and businesses and cancellations of events could have major impact on communities and citizens.
 - Care for sick family members and fear of exposure can result in significant worker absenteeism.
- *Communications and Information are Critical Components of Pandemic Response*
 - Education and outreach are critical to preparing for a pandemic.
 - Understanding what a pandemic is, what needs to be done at all levels to prepare for pandemic influenza, and what could happen during a pandemic helps us make informed decisions, both as individuals and as a nation.
 - Should a pandemic occur, the public must be able to depend on its government to provide scientifically sound public health information quickly, openly and dependably.

Why is there such concern now?

Health professionals are concerned that the continued and expanded spread of a highly pathogenic avian H5N1 virus across eastern Asia and other countries represents a significant threat. The H5N1 virus has raised concerns about a potential human pandemic because:

- It is especially virulent.
- It is being spread by migratory birds.
- It can be transmitted from birds to mammals and in some limited circumstances to humans.
- Like other influenza viruses, it continues to evolve.

Since 2003, a growing number of human H5N1 cases have been reported in Azerbaijan, Cambodia, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Thailand, Turkey and Vietnam. More than half of the people infected with the H5N1 virus have died. Most of these cases are believed to have been caused by exposure to infected poultry. The concern is that H5N1 will evolve into a virus capable of human-to-human transmission.

Pandemic Influenza Planning Considerations for MRC Units

Note: The following actions are not mandatory and may not be applicable to all MRC units. They are presented only for consideration by MRC units in planning and preparedness activities.

MRC Involvement in Community Preparedness Leadership and Networking

- Ensure the MRC unit is represented on the community's Pandemic Preparedness Coordinating Committee (or similar organization) that represents all relevant stakeholders in the jurisdiction, including local, state and federal government; public health; healthcare; emergency response (law enforcement, fire service, emergency medical services and emergency management); agriculture; education; business and industry; media and telecommunications; community-based organizations; churches and faith-based organizations; and private citizens. This committee or similar entity is accountable for articulating strategic priorities and overseeing the development and execution of the jurisdiction's pandemic influenza response plan.
- Ensure the community's emergency operations plan (EOP) or pandemic influenza response plan delineates accountability and responsibility, capabilities, and resources of the local MRC unit.
- Ensure that the MRC-related elements of the jurisdiction's pandemic influenza response plan and/or EOP are compliant with the National Incident Management System (NIMS).
- Formalize agreements with neighboring jurisdictions and address communications, mutual aid and other cross-jurisdictional needs involving MRC units.

- If applicable (i.e., within the scope and capabilities of the local MRC unit), ensure the pandemic influenza response plan and/or EOP addresses the assistance the MRC unit can provide to special needs populations or those vulnerable due to language barriers within the community.
- If applicable, address any mental health support services (for longstanding patients as well as unique post-trauma needs) that the MRC unit can provide for the community, including patients and their families, and those affected by community containment procedures in the pandemic influenza response plan and/or EOP.
- If applicable, ensure the MRC unit is included in the emergency public information (EPI) or risk communications plan that addresses the needs of targeted public, private sector, governmental, public health, medical and emergency response audiences; identifies priority channels of communication; delineates the network of public information personnel, including lead spokespersons and persons trained in emergency risk communications; and links to other communication networks.
- Ensure the pandemic influenza response plan and/or EOP identifies the legal authorities established to utilize MRC volunteers and protect them from liability in the performance of their volunteer duties.
- Ensure the pandemic influenza response plan and/or EOP clearly describes the process necessary to request, activate and utilize the local MRC unit(s), as well as resources from outside of the area which may assist the community in times of emergency.
- Ensure MRC volunteers are trained in, and utilize, the Incident Command System (ICS) and comply with NIMS in the performance of their responsibilities, in accordance with the pandemic influenza response plan and/or EOP.
- Ensure the MRC unit is represented on community-based task forces that support healthcare institutions on a local or regional basis.
- Identify the authorities responsible for officially activating the MRC unit under the pandemic influenza response plan and/or EOP.

MRC Support to Public Health and Medical Infrastructure

- If applicable, develop and test procedures for the MRC unit to support surge capacity of public health agencies, hospitals, clinical laboratories and other healthcare institutions to meet the needs of the jurisdiction during an influenza pandemic.
- Determine how the MRC unit can assist each component of the healthcare delivery network (e.g., hospitals, long-term care, home care and emergency care), as well as the special needs of vulnerable and hard-to-reach patients. Ensure this assistance is described in the pandemic influenza response plan and/or EOP.

- If applicable, ensure the pandemic influenza response plan and/or EOP adequately describes MRC support for mortuary services during an influenza pandemic.
- Maintain a current roster of all active and former MRC members who may be available to support emergency operations. Ensure procedures are established to contact, recall and deploy MRC volunteers in an emergency.
- Ensure the MRC unit is involved in planning for the utilization of spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers (SUVs) in an emergency. Ensure that any Volunteer Reception Center established by the community (to facilitate the proper placement and utilization of SUVs) includes representation from the local MRC unit.
- Ensure credentialing of MRC volunteers is included in the community's (and/or state's) procedures for verifying credentials of volunteer healthcare personnel. Ensure MRC volunteers have provided information on licenses, certifications, training and other pertinent information to authorities and/or agencies responsible for credentialing or verification of credentials of volunteer healthcare personnel.
- As appropriate, ensure MRC volunteers are properly trained and equipped to support healthcare facilities and the jurisdiction with isolating and cohorting patients with known or suspected influenza.
- As appropriate, ensure MRC volunteers are properly trained and equipped to support healthcare facilities if a quarantine of potentially exposed healthcare personnel is necessary.

MRC Support for Infection Control and Clinical Operations

- If appropriate, ensure the MRC unit has access to Health Alert Network information.
- Ensure MRC volunteers are educated about pandemic influenza and infection control and clinical guidelines, as well as personal preparedness methods.
- Ensure the MRC unit is included in the jurisdiction's EPI or risk communications plan to regularly update providers as an influenza pandemic unfolds.
- As appropriate, ensure MRC volunteers, especially clinicians, have access to EPI-X and are trained in its use.

MRC Support for Vaccine Distribution and Use

- Ensure the MRC unit is included in state and local plans for vaccine distribution, use and monitoring; and for communication of vaccine status.

- Ensure the MRC unit is included in exercises of state and local plans that address the procurement, storage, security, distribution and monitoring actions necessary (including vaccine safety) to ensure access to vaccines and medicines during a pandemic.
- Ensure the MRC unit is included in, and can support (as appropriate), plans and procedures for tracking the number and priority of vaccine recipients; where and by whom vaccinations will be given; a distribution plan for ensuring that vaccine and necessary equipment and supplies are available at all points of distribution in the community; the security and logistical support for the points of distribution; and the training requirements for involved personnel.
- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit can support the community's plans and procedures related to vaccine security issues, cold chain requirements, transport and storage issues and bio-hazardous waste issues.
- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit can support the community's plans and procedures addressing the needs of vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations in a pandemic influenza event.
- Document with written agreements the commitments and participation of MRC volunteers in any pandemic influenza response and/or vaccination plans.
- Ensure MRC volunteers are considered for priority, along with first responders, healthcare providers and other emergency services personnel, in the community's pandemic influenza response and/or vaccination plans.
- Inform MRC volunteers in advance about where they will be vaccinated.

MRC Support for Antiviral Drug Distribution and Use

- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit is included in state and local plans for the distribution and use of antiviral drugs during a pandemic via the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) to healthcare facilities that will administer them to priority groups.
- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit can support plans that address the procurement, storage, security, distribution and monitoring actions necessary to assure access to treatments during an influenza pandemic.

MRC Involvement in Pandemic Influenza Emergency Response Exercises

- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit is included in exercises of the jurisdiction's plan to investigate and contain potential cases or local outbreaks of influenza potentially caused by a novel or pandemic strain.
- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit is included in exercises of the jurisdiction's containment plan that delineates procedures for isolation and quarantine; the procedures

and legal authorities for implementing and enforcing these containment measures (such as school closures, canceling public transportation and other movement restrictions within, to, and from the jurisdiction); and the methods that will be used to support, service and monitor those affected by these containment measures in healthcare facilities, other residential facilities, homes, community facilities and other settings.

- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit is included in exercises of the jurisdiction's plan to implement various levels of movement restrictions within, to, and from the jurisdiction.
- Determine the MRC unit's role in informing citizens in advance about what containment procedures may be used in the community (as part of the MRC unit's involvement in the jurisdiction's EPI or risk communication plan, as appropriate).

MRC Involvement in Public Information and Risk Communication

- Assess readiness to support the jurisdiction's EPI or risk communication needs in preparation for an influenza pandemic, including regular review, exercise and update of EPI or risk communication plans.
- Plan and coordinate support for EPI or risk communication activities with government agencies, private industry, education and non-profit partners (e.g., local American Red Cross chapters).
- Identify and train lead subject-specific spokespersons, if appropriate.
- Provide MRC volunteers with training on risk communication for use during an influenza pandemic.
- Develop and maintain up-to-date contacts of key stakeholders and public information personnel, and participate in exercises of the plan to provide regular updates to the community as an influenza pandemic unfolds.
- As appropriate, support community resources, such as hotlines and websites, to respond to local questions from the public and professional groups.

Planning for the Impact of Pandemic Influenza on the MRC Unit

- Expect and allow for absences and/or unavailability of MRC volunteers during a pandemic due to factors such as personal illness, family member illness, community containment measures and quarantines, school and/or business closures and public transportation closures.
- Encourage and track annual influenza vaccination for MRC members.
- Develop and disseminate programs and materials covering pandemic fundamentals (e.g. signs and symptoms of influenza and modes of transmission), personal and family

protection and response strategies (e.g. hand hygiene, coughing/sneezing etiquette and contingency plans). Educate volunteers during meetings and training sessions.

- Anticipate MRC volunteers' fear and anxiety, rumors and misinformation, and plan communications accordingly.
- Identify and/or develop platforms (e.g. hotlines, dedicated websites) for communicating pandemic status and actions to MRC volunteers in a consistent and timely way, including redundancies in the emergency contact system.
- Ensure MRC volunteers are aware of community sources for timely and accurate pandemic information (domestic and international) and resources for obtaining counter-measures (e.g., vaccines and antiviral medications).
- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit is included in continuity of operations plans for essential health department services, including contingency planning for increasing the public health workforce in response to absenteeism among health department staff and stakeholder groups that have key responsibilities under a community's pandemic influenza response plan and/or EOP.
- Ensure availability of psychosocial support services (including educational and training materials) for MRC volunteers who participate in or provide support for the response to public health emergencies such as influenza pandemics.
- In conjunction with community efforts, participate in workforce resilience programs and ensure readiness to deploy to maximize volunteers' performance and personal resilience during a public health emergency.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Websites

Pandemic Influenza

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov> - the official U.S. government website for information on pandemic and avian influenza.

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/> - CDC pandemic influenza website.

<http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/cidrap/content/influenza/panflu/index.html> - University of Minnesota Center for Infectious Disease Research & Policy pandemic influenza website.

Avian Influenza

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/> - CDC avian influenza website.

<http://www.state.gov/g/oes/avianflu/> - State Department avian influenza website.

http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/home/News/news_items/avian_influenza.html - USAID avian influenza website.

http://www.idsociety.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Resources/Avian_Pandemic_Flu/Avian_Pandemic_Flu.htm - Infectious Diseases Society of America avian and pandemic influenza website.

http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/ - WHO avian influenza website.

http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome?navtype=SU&navid=AVIAN_INFLUENZA - USDA avian influenza website.

http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/avian_influenza/index.jsp - USGS avian influenza website.

<http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Feature/aiInDepth.htm> - Iowa State University Center for Food Security and Public Health avian influenza website.

Seasonal Influenza

<http://www.hhs.gov/flu/> - HHS seasonal influenza website.

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/> - CDC seasonal influenza website.

<http://www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/flu.html> - FDA seasonal influenza website.

<http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/cidrap/content/influenza/general/index.html> - University of Minnesota Center for Infectious Disease Research & Policy seasonal influenza website.

Planning Guidance, Checklists and Toolkits

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/pandemic-influenza.html> - National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza.

<http://www.hhs.gov/pandemicflu/plan/> - HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan.

<http://www.hhs.gov/pandemicflu/plan/factsheet.html> - HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan fact sheet.

http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/editorial/editorial_0566.xml - National Response Plan.

<http://www.hhs.gov/emergency/mediaguide/PDF/> - Terrorism and Other Public Health Emergencies: A Reference Guide for the Media.

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/statelocalchecklist.html> - State and Local Influenza Planning Checklist.

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/stateplans.html> - Pandemic Planning: A Convening of the States.

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab3.html> - Pandemic Influenza Planning: A Guide for Individuals and Families.

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab4.html> - Business Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist.

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab5.html> - Pandemic Influenza Planning for Schools.

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab6.html> - Pandemic Influenza Planning for Healthcare Providers.

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/healthprofessional.htm> - CDC Pandemic Influenza Toolkit (for healthcare providers).

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab7.html> - Faith-Based & Community Organizations Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Checklist.

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tools.html> - Planning Tools (FluAid, FluSurge and Pandemic Influenza Tabletop Exercise).