

MODULE 1: INCIDENT NOTIFICATION

[April]

There are new fears over a brand new influenza virus identified in Asia and the Middle East. Health officials say this strain is *not* related to the 2009 H1N1 pandemic virus, and in fact, appears to be more severe than that strain. Right now, the World Health Organization is keeping the Pandemic Influenza Phase at three -- meaning infections are showing up mostly in animals but there are a few human infections. The Phase level could rise if health officials discover widespread human to human transmission in this new virus.

Influenza has become a high priority for public health officials all over the world since the 2009 H1N1 pandemic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urges everyone to be alert for signs of flu in their communities. Even seasonal flu kills 36,000 people every year in the U.S. -- the figure represents between 500 and 700 Alabamians.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported a number of possible cases of human-to-human transmission of the novel or new flu virus in Asia and the Middle East.

CDC and public health understands more about flu and flu pandemics from the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, but they do not understand where or why a new flu virus emerges. With the appearance of a possible new pandemic flu virus, we need to remember what we learned from the last pandemic. Organizations need to review their continuity of operations plan, and everyone needs to implement infection controls measures, like hand washing and covering your cough and sneeze, to minimize the impact of a new virus before it appears in the United States.

Currently, the new flu virus has not been detected in the United States. However, we here in Alabama must lean forward to make certain we are prepared to respond quickly when it arrives. ADPH is reviewing plans and preparing our staff to enhance surveillance, ensure the laboratory has the necessary supplies and protocols, distribute antivirals and supplies, and ensure the department is ready to respond.

Everyone should learn facts about the influenza disease. The incubation period for the flu virus can range from one to two days. People could come in contact with the virus and unknowingly carry it into their family, work, community, and state.

Initial influenza-like symptoms include a fever of 100 or more, cough or fever and a sore throat. Additional symptoms may include body aches, headache, extreme fatigue, and some have reported vomiting and diarrhea.

If someone believes they are infected, they should isolate themselves or the infected person immediately. They should also call their primary care provider and see if they are eligible for antivirals. They should use fever reducers and other over the counter medications. Surgical

masks may be considered for your home, car, office, and for those with high-risk medical conditions.

Everyone should practice healthy hygiene – wash your hands, use hand sanitizer, clean and disinfect regularly, and consider surgical masks for family members who may be at high-risk.

Flu is transmitted through droplets from coughing and sneezing and through contact with an infected person, or surface.

Key Issues

- Newly identified influenza virus identified in Asia and the Middle East appears to be more severe than the previous pandemic strain.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) reset the Pandemic Influenza Phase back to Phase 3, which is defined by predominantly animal infections and few human infections.
- CDC and ADPH cannot predict where or why a new flu virus emerges.
- Remember what was learned from the 2009 H1N1 pandemic with regards to infection control, symptoms, and disease patterns.

Questions

Based on the information provided, participate in the discussion concerning the issues raised in Module 1. Identify any additional requirements, critical issues, decisions, and/or questions that should be addressed at this time.

The following questions are provided as suggested general subjects that you may wish to address as the discussion progresses. These questions are not meant to constitute a definitive list of concerns to be addressed, nor is there a requirement to address every question.

- Does your organization have a continuity of operations plan (COOP)?
- If yes, when was the last time it was updated?
- If no, why has your organization not created a COOP?
- Has your organization discuss emergency personal preparedness with staff?
- Has your organization discuss infection control measures for seasonal flu?
- Has your organization conducted occupational risk assessment for all employees?
- Where can your organization get more information?

MODULE 2: INITIAL RESPONSE

[December]

A “public health emergency” has been declared by both the Governor and the President after learning the pandemic influenza virus could be more severe than originally thought. New CDC data shows a 3% case fatality rate – meaning 3 out of every 100 sick people are dying. The figures have prompted the U.S. to elevate the Pandemic Severity Index to a Category 5. In an effort to help slow the spread of the virus, federal and state officials are increasing the time for implementing community mitigation strategies to 12 weeks. Some of these strategies could include closing schools, banning public gatherings, and modifying the workplace.

The virus has now spread to every county and every community in the state of Alabama which prevents the Public Health Department from counting the exact number of flu cases. That number though is expected to grow every 4 days until the virus peaks, and 832,000 new cases are predicted in Alabama by the end of the month.

An increase in cases means an increase in deaths. Alabama is reporting more than 1,000 deaths related to the pandemic virus and is investigating hundreds more. If the numbers of cases increase as projected, more than 20,000 Alabamians could die during the pandemic which means several counties should expect challenges with morgue storage, transportation, and community education.

Challenges are already popping up in our healthcare facilities. Waiting rooms at hospitals and doctor’s offices are filled to capacity with patients experiencing flu-like symptoms. Provider staff members are calling in sick or simply not showing up for work in fear of becoming infected with the flu virus. A large medical surge has pushed hospitals to maximum operating capacity and therefore forced them to implement reduced standards of care protocols.

State and local public health facilities are providing education and what’s left of basic supplies, like N95 masks, hand gel, and gloves. The only preventive medicine is the vaccine, which won’t be available for several more weeks due to manufacturing guidelines.

Alabama is in the seventh week of the second wave of this pandemic. Since the first wave lasted 12 weeks, we are expecting this wave to last up to 16-20 weeks. The state may be near the peak of the second wave and the transmission rate should slow down.

The vast majority of people who get the flu do not need to see a doctor. They need to stay home, stay hydrated, and keep their fever down. It may take several days or weeks to recover, but the vast majority of people who get the flu will make a full recovery. If they experience complications, like shortness of breath, skin color changes, chest pain, feeling better and then getting worse, they need to go to their local healthcare provider. The death toll is estimated to

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be over 1,000 in Alabama. In the end, Alabama may experience over 20,000 deaths resulting from pandemic influenza.

Local mortuary service process is overwhelmed and will continue to be overwhelmed for several more weeks and months.

Vaccine technology is still the chicken and egg process. No vaccine will be available until the end of the second wave.

Public Health is working to assist hospitals and other healthcare providers throughout the state. Hospitals are currently filled to capacity and caregivers are overwhelmed.

It's not just Alabama getting hit hard by the virus... outbreaks and resource shortages are also being reported in the neighboring states of Mississippi, Georgia, Tennessee, and Florida, which will prevent states from assisting each other as they do in other emergency events.

In an attempt to stop the spread of the deadly virus, state officials are closing all schools and colleges... banning all sporting and religious events... and prohibiting gathering in crowds of any kind until further notice.

Representatives from Alabama Power, Alagasco, TVA, and most major critical infrastructure companies say they're doing their best to keep essential functions operating, but things may be slower than normal due to employee absenteeism. It's the same situation for many retailers in the area – a lot of them have closed because too many employees are out sick. Some places like Wal-Mart and Target are still open, though their stock is dwindling dramatically.

Alabama is averaging up to 255 deaths every day and many around the state are scrambling to deal with the loss of life.

Key Issues

- Local hospitals are being overwhelmed by the number of patients requiring treatment.
- The president has declared the pandemic a “Public health emergency.”
- A local state of emergency and a governor’s emergency declaration has been made.
- The public and the media must be supplied with accurate and helpful information in order to reduce confusion and panic and promote safety and confidence.

Questions

Based on the information provided, participate in the discussion concerning the issues raised in Module 2. Identify any additional requirements, critical issues, decisions, and/or questions that should be addressed at this time.

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The following questions are provided as suggested general subjects that you may wish to address as the discussion progresses. These questions are not meant to constitute a definitive list of concerns to be addressed, nor is there a requirement to address every question in this section.

- What are your organization's key resources needed to keep essential functions operating?
- Do your suppliers/vendors have a COOP to ensure delivery of key resources?
- Which essential functions in your organization can be accomplished with telework?
- What is your organization's human resource policy for a pandemic?
- Does your organization have a method to monitor sick employees and when they expect to return?
- How could your organization get outside help to complete essential functions?
- How will your organization communicate with employees, clients and authorities during a pandemic?