



Sedgwick County...
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Pandemic Influenza (Flu) Update

Local News:

Members of the Pandemic Influenza Work Group (PIWG) met on October 14th at the University of Kansas School of Medicine-Wichita. Sonia Jordan gave a presentation on the Kansas System for the Early Registration of Volunteers (K-SERV) database. The K-SERV database is used to register healthcare and non-healthcare volunteers. The system verifies the credentials and identity of each volunteer, provides volunteer coordinators with a list of volunteers in case of a disaster, tracks deployment of volunteers, and checks availability of volunteers state-wide. Sonia discussed the background of K-SERV and the specific operating process. Registration instructions were provided along with future goals for K-SERV.

Cindy Burbach presented information on where we've been and where we are now in terms of pandemic flu preparedness. She noted that as early as the fall of 2001 an epidemiologist from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) presented information on the possibility of an influenza pandemic. Cindy's presentation included the history of the PIWG (meetings began towards the end of 2005), a description of the format of the meetings, the agencies represented by the work group and an overview of the funding for the PIWG. Accomplishments were discussed in detail, as were the lessons learned and challenges still to come.

Fourteen presentations were given by the subcommittee chairs in which they noted what has been done by their subcommittee since its formation, what still needs to be done (if anything), and what new policy, procedure, or partnership exists because of the work by the subcommittee.

Certificates of appreciation were given to all in attendance, with the subcommittee chairs receiving a Ready Tube (i.e., personal preparedness kit). There are no meetings scheduled for either the PIWG or for the members of the steering committee.

Subcommittees will continue to work on completing sections of the pan flu plan that are not finished and/or need revised. If there are changes in the global status of avian influenza, strategic partners will be notified and the PIWG will reconvene.

National News:

A recent report from the National Governors Association (NGA) indicates that although state pandemic preparedness has improved, gaps still remain. Nine regional pandemic preparedness workshops involving all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and four out of five U.S. territories were conducted, with a focus on areas that are common to all states: healthcare, commerce, education, and safety.

The authors of the report noted one major caveat to assessing state preparedness-no baseline or any agreed metric against which state preparedness can reasonably be measured. The report found the most gaps in areas that don't relate directly to healthcare, but instead to things such as continuing government operations, maintaining essential services, and coordinating with the private sector.

It was noted that most states aren't prepared to manage the economic impacts of a pandemic because they haven't estimated them and that no state has reported having agreements with private sector food distribution and retail system to ensure the reliability of the food supply. The educational systems will likely be severely affected by a pandemic; however as the NGA authors indicated, schools are well-suited to manage a range of problems. One gap that was found is the lack of situational awareness that administrators need before recommending closing or reopening schools.

The authors also reported that states acknowledged they were unprepared if a concurrent event such as a hurricane or earthquake were to strike during a pandemic. Several recommendations were made based on the workshop findings, which can be found at <http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0809PANDEMICASSESSMENT.PDF>.



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Health Department

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International News:

As of September 10, 2008 there have been a total of 387 confirmed human cases and 245 confirmed deaths due to H5N1 avian influenza. The reported number of cases and deaths due to H5N1 avian influenza for 2008 is 36 and 28 respectively. None of these have occurred in the United States.

An internal report prepared by the World Bank estimates that a severe influenza pandemic could cause a recession costing more than \$3 trillion, according to Bloomberg News. Slowing tourism, transportation, retail sales, and productivity, along with worker absenteeism, could reduce the global domestic product (GDP) by 4.8%. This is an increase from June 2006 when the World Bank estimated the GDP would drop by 3.1%. If a moderate pandemic were to occur, global economic activity could be reduced by 2%. In the case of a mild pandemic, it is estimated that the GDP would be reduced by 0.7%. According to Bloomberg News, the World Bank predicts that changes in individual behavior, such as avoiding air travel, restaurants, and mass transportation could account for 60% of the costs during a pandemic.

A recent Associated Press (AP) report reveals that the United States has rules barring the exportation of vaccines for avian influenza, smallpox, yellow fever, and many other pathogens to five countries classified as sponsors of terrorism. Under the Department of Commerce rules, vaccines cannot be exported to Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria unless they obtain a special export license, which can take weeks. Pandemic flu vaccines are not restricted under the rules; however, Cuba, Iran and Sudan are subject to a ban on pandemic flu vaccines as part of general U.S. trade embargoes covering nearly all products. The AP report notes that restrictions were quietly established in the mid 1990s and were strengthened after the attacks on September 11, 2001 and subsequent anthrax mailings. In reference to avian flu vaccines for poultry, the Assistant Commerce Secretary said there are valid reasons for taking steps to ensure they do not fall into the wrong hands, but declined to explain what kind of threat they pose. Scientists and experts that were quoted in the AP report questioned the reasoning behind the restriction of vaccine, stating that the idea of weaponizing the H5N1 avian flu virus is not a concern since the virus does not easily infect humans or spread easily from person to person. It was noted that the virus could be used as a weapon against poultry, but that's not about the vaccine itself. An immunology and biosecurity expert was quoted as saying he could not think of any scientific reason on how a terrorist organization could use such a vaccine for malicious intent. The only potential implication, as noted by an infectious disease expert, is if you had individuals working on weaponizing the agent, vaccination would provide protection to those individuals.

Upcoming meetings/exercises: There are no meetings scheduled; future PIWG meetings will be convened as needed.