

Experiences of one local health department's efforts in pandemic influenza planning

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Introduction

Pandemic influenza has become a focal point of preparedness efforts nationwide. Local preparedness efforts in Suffolk County (located in New York State) are well underway. Suffolk County is situated less than one hour from New York City, and has a population of approximately 1.5 million residents spread out over 900 square miles.



Specific examples of some of the planning efforts currently underway include pandemic influenza education to public school districts and mass fatality planning with healthcare system partners. Furthermore, the Suffolk County Department of Health Services (SCDHS) continues to promote influenza vaccination through its annual vaccine campaign.

Education

The SCDHS has worked closely with public school districts. Presentations to nurses and administrators have included the following topics:

- Distinction between seasonal and pandemic influenza
- Method of transmission
- Steps to take to reduce the risk
- Importance of school absenteeism surveillance to County's communicable disease surveillance efforts

Efforts are made to promote social marketing tools to school districts in order to encourage behavior changes to reduce transmission of disease. Examples include:

- Free posters and brochures from the New York State Department of Health
- Video on cough etiquette



A Point of Distribution exercise was held at a public high school to demonstrate mass vaccination to school district personnel.

What is a POD?

- A Point of Distribution, or POD is a location where individuals can receive:
 - triage
 - education
 - medical screening and
 - antibiotics or vaccinationfrom exposure to a man-made or natural public health threat



Mass Fatality Planning

Key stakeholders have also been engaged in pandemic influenza planning, with one specific example being mass fatality planning. A severe pandemic may result in over 10,000 deaths, which would quickly overwhelm mortuary surge capacity. Suffolk County is planning for the potential need for mass burial.

Groups that have met already include:

- Hospitals
- Nursing homes
- Funeral Directors
- County Emergency Management

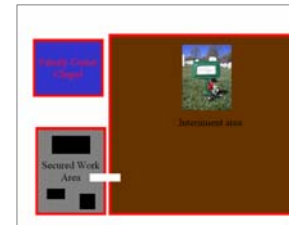
Future plans are to present plan to the general public, including religious organizations and other key stakeholders.

Removal Team



ME Representative
Security
Driver
Stretcher bearers

Slides from presentation



Annual Vaccine Campaigns

SCDHS vaccinates nearly 12,000 high risk adults in over 50 clinics annually. Clinics are staffed by SCDHS staff and nursing students. During the 2004 vaccine shortage, SCDHS was able to vaccinate 1200 high risk adults at one clinic in 5 hours with minimal staff (20).

In about one week, SCDHS also distributed over 40,000 doses of influenza vaccine to private physicians in 2005 when more vaccine became available. SCDHS is planning to utilize a similar mechanism during future mass prophylaxis events.

Future Planning

Communication with the public is a critical step in effective pandemic influenza preparedness. SCDHS plans on creating a print brochure and website for distribution to the county's residents.

Acknowledgments

We thank the hard working staff at the Suffolk County Department of Health Services for making pandemic influenza preparedness a high priority. Additional thanks go to the public school districts in Suffolk County who have embraced the importance of pandemic influenza planning.

For further information

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