



LESSON LEARNED

Pandemic Influenza Preparedness: Developing Regional Continuity of Operations Plans for Health Departments

SUMMARY

State public health departments should develop regional plans for maintaining essential public health services and providing redundant staffing capabilities during an emergency.

DESCRIPTION

The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals/Office of Public Health (DHH/OPH) sponsored a series of pandemic influenza tabletop exercises (TTX) throughout the state from December 2006 to February 2007. On January 31, 2007, DHH/OPH Region VI conducted a TTX in Alexandria, LA. TTX participants represented 5 state organizations and 37 regional and local organizations. The goal of the TTX was to engage community partners in a discussion of Emergency Support Function (ESF)-8 (public health and emergency medical) roles and responsibilities, expectations, and anticipated challenges in the face of an influenza pandemic. One TTX objective was to assess the familiarity of pandemic influenza planning among internal (ESF-8) and external stakeholders. The TTX scenario consisted of a severe influenza pandemic emerging in OPH Region VI.

Region VI

Louisiana's Office of Public Health Region VI is located in Alexandria, Louisiana, and includes the parishes of Avoyelles, Catahoula, Concordia, Grant, LaSalle, Rapides, Vernon, and Winn.

TTX participants observed that a continuity of operations plan (COOP) is essential for an effective regional response to a pandemic. However, they noted that DHH/OPH Region VI lacked a COOP. In order to develop a COOP, the DHH/OPH leaders should determine which public health programs are deemed to be essential and which are non-essential. DHH/OPH regions cannot effectively plan for continuing operations in the face of potentially high absenteeism among employees until they receive clear policy guidance from the agency's leaders. Once essential and non-essential services are identified, DHH/OPH regions should develop a strategy and accompanying COOP for maintaining the essential public health services during a pandemic. If gaps in manpower are identified, regions should identify redundant staffing capabilities to meet these directives and should conduct cross-training of employees in advance of a pandemic.

State public health departments should develop regional plans for maintaining essential public health services and providing redundant staffing capabilities during an emergency.

CITATION

Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Louisiana Office of Public Health. *Pandemic Influenza External Tabletop Exercise Program After-Action Reports*. 26 Feb 2007.
<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=26393>

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