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LESSON LEARNED

School Emergency Management Planning: Designating an Office to Manage Communication with Families during a Pandemic Influenza Outbreak

SUMMARY

Higher education institutions should consider designating a single department or office to manage communication with families during a pandemic influenza outbreak. University plans should also include provisions for establishing a call center during a pandemic influenza emergency.

DESCRIPTION

On October 10, 2007, the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) held a tabletop exercise (TTX) simulating the effect of a worldwide pandemic influenza outbreak on its Wilmington campus. The exercise scenario included the identification of a suspected avian influenza case on the UNCW campus. The purpose of this exercise was to evaluate the UNCW pandemic influenza response plan and to better prepare UNCW emergency responders for a widespread pandemic influenza situation. The exercise included 15 participants representing 12 UNCW departments.

UNCW offers 89 degree programs to over 12,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

TTX evaluators observed that no single department or office is assigned with answering or returning phone calls from families during a pandemic influenza outbreak. The TTX after-action report (AAR) recommended that UNCW administrators assign this responsibility to one department or office on campus. The AAR also noted that the university should develop a plan for establishing a call center where all questions regarding university status can be routed. This plan should be incorporated into the UNCW pandemic influenza emergency response plan and should include directions for staffing the call center. Additionally, TTX evaluators noted that scripts should be developed to ensure uniformity when communicating crisis information to families.

Higher education institutions should consider designating a single department or office to be charged with communicating information to families during a pandemic influenza emergency. University plans should also include provisions for establishing a call center during a pandemic influenza outbreak.

CITATION

University of North Carolina Wilmington, Environmental Health and Safety Department. *UNCW Pandemic Flu Exercise October 10, 2007, After Action Report*. 20 Oct 2007. <https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=32140>

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