

Flu for Thought II
Human Influenza Pandemic Exercise

Washington DC
November 6, 2008

USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service
Office of Food Defense and Emergency Response

Draft Summary Report

December 2008

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BACKGROUND

Concerns exist about the potential for avian influenza to mutate into a human-to-human transmissible strain and potentially cause an influenza pandemic. The Homeland Security Council's Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza requires Federal departments and agencies, including FSIS, to develop operational plans addressing considerations raised during a pandemic, protection of employees, maintenance of essential functions and services, support of the Federal response, and the communication of messages about pandemic planning.

FSIS has an essential role as part of the ongoing federal efforts to prepare for the possibility of a human pandemic influenza. FSIS is actively addressing the need to coordinate response actions in the event of a pandemic in the United States. During a crisis, it is critical that FSIS be able to efficiently and effectively coordinate with its staff in the field to maintain essential functions.

In accordance with USDA guidance, operational plans in the event of a human influenza outbreak or pandemic are to be tested/exercised on a routine basis. FSIS' *Human Pandemic Operations Plan* (November 2006) states that the Agency's plan will be tested on an annual basis. On November 6, 2008, FSIS conducted a tabletop exercise simulating an influenza pandemic. The exercise, held at USDA's Emergency Operations Center in Washington, DC, provided an opportunity to:

- test FSIS' ability to coordinate and manage the allocation of limited resources during a human pandemic in collaboration with external stakeholders; and
- validate actions taken following the March 2007 human pandemic exercise (Flu for Thought I).

This report provides a high level summary of the issues discussed at the exercise.

GOALS OF THE EXERCISE

The exercise was focused on the following objectives:

1. Test the *FSIS Human Pandemic Operations Plan*
 - Communications
 - Coordination
 - Response actions

2. Simulate interactions among:
 - Department of Agriculture
 - FSIS
 - Industry
 - Consumer groups

PARTICIPANTS

The exercise involved the participation of a total of 21 players from the following stakeholder groups:

- Department-USDA-Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration, as the USDA Human Pandemic Coordinator.
- Food Safety and Inspection Service—including representatives from the Office of Food Defense and Emergency Response (OFDER), Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education (OPACE), Office of International Affairs (OIA), Office of Program Evaluation, Enforcement, and Review (OPEER), Office of Field Operations (OFO), Office of Management (OM), Office of Outreach, Employee Education, and Training (OOEET), Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), and Office of Public Health Science (OPHS).
- Industry—including representatives from The American Meat Institute (AMI), The National Turkey Federation (NTF), United Egg Association, National Chicken Council (NCC), and U.S. Poultry & Egg Association.
- Consumer Groups—including representatives from Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) and the Center for Foodborne Illness Research and Prevention (CFI).

EXERCISE OVERVIEW

The exercise was structured around a hypothetical human pandemic scenario consisting of four phases:

- Phase 1 (Federal Government Response Stages 0-2)—Pre-Pandemic Planning
- Phase 2 (Stages 3-4)—Pre-Pandemic Preparation
- Phase 3 (Stages 5)—Response
- Phase 4 (Stage 6)—Recovery

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Summary information for each phase of the scenario is as follows:

Phase 1 (Stage 0)

- In late March 2008, USDA Operations Center reported confirmed outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1 in poultry in two small villages in Asia.

Phase 1 (Stage 1)

- In early August, 25 cases of unusually severe respiratory illness are identified in residents living in a village located in China's Guangdong province in Southern China as well as a small community near Bangkok, Thailand.
- WHO notifies CDC, and CDC sends a Health Alert Network (HAN) advisory to other federal agencies and state health departments advising them to be on the alert for cases of unusual respiratory illnesses in individuals with a recent history of travel to or through China or Thailand.

Phase 1 (Stage 2)

- WHO confirms that individuals in a village in China's Guangdong province and a village near Bangkok Thailand continue to become infected with the new influenza subtype now referred to as the South China/ Thailand influenza virus.
- WHO is actively monitoring the situation and advising the international community.

Phase 2 (Stage 3)

- Clusters of human illnesses are reported in neighboring countries of Singapore, Vietnam, Taiwan, and the Philippines. Testing confirms these illnesses are caused by the South China/Thailand influenza virus.
- Gateway airports in the United States begin enhanced monitoring for passengers with symptoms of respiratory distress coming from or passing through China, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Taiwan, and the Philippines. Quarantine facilities and protocols at the airports in these countries are reviewed and activated.
- The USDA Human Pandemic Coordinator notifies USDA Pandemic Action Officers that Federal Response Stage 3 has been declared in the U.S. and for the federal agencies to implement plans accordingly. FSIS entered an Incident Report in the FSIS Incident Management System and the Emergency Management Committee was alerted for possible activation.

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Phase 2 (Stage 4)

- A passenger arriving at Dulles Airport from the Philippines exhibited respiratory distress upon arrival and was placed in quarantine for confirmation testing by the CDC. Results of tests confirmed that the respiratory infection is caused by South China/Thailand influenza virus.
- The passenger manifest shows passengers from the same flight took connecting flights to Boston, MA, Kansas City, MO, and Dallas, TX.
- The CDC has declared that the Federal Government is in Response Stage 4. USDA Human Pandemic Action Officers are advised to implement Stage 4 actions immediately. FSIS activated the FSIS Emergency Management Committee.

Phase 3 (Stage 5)

- Program areas with personnel in Kansas City and Dallas have reported a slight increase in what maybe influenza-related absenteeism that has not yet affected the ability of any program office to perform their functions.
- CDC reports multiple cases of human influenza of the South China/ Thailand influenza virus in Boston, Kansas City, and Dallas. United States government declares a Stage 5 Pandemic Federal Response.
- Program areas with personnel in Kansas City and Dallas have reported a 20 percent increase in employee absenteeism across the board. These numbers include all scheduled leave. Incident Report in the FSIS Incident Management System is updated with the above information.
- Program areas with personnel in Kansas City and Dallas have reported a three-fold increase in South China/ Thailand influenza cases.
- Internal tracking of FSIS' employees indicate a 35-45 percent level of absenteeism. The collected information is entered into the FSIS Incident Management System as an updated attachment to the IR for the incident as well as e-mailed to the Recorder on duty for the EMC.
- Regulated Industry also reports 35-45 percent level of absenteeism.
- No food shortages are reported in affected regions.

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- The Federal government has imposed restrictions on travel to and from Texas, Kansas, and Missouri.

Stage 4 (Phase 6)

- Program areas with personnel in Kansas City and Dallas have reported that employee absenteeism has decreased to about 25 percent.
- OFO has also reported that 30 percent of meat, poultry and egg product establishments have resumed full operations.
- The collected information is entered into the FSIS Incident Management System as an attachment to the IR for the incident as well as e-mailed to the Recorder on duty for the EMC.
- The CDC has reported no new cases the South China/ Thailand influenza virus in other parts of the United States. Travel restrictions to and from affected states has been lifted.
- Reported that employee absenteeism has leveled off at about 10 percent.
- All meat, poultry and egg product establishments have resumed full operations.
- EMC prepares post activation assessment.

EXERCISE STRUCTURE

In each phase, the scenario advanced as new information regarding the outbreak was presented on a screen and read aloud by the exercise facilitator. All participants received the same information at same time, followed by facilitator-led, open group discussion. The exercise facilitator asked questions following the presentation of each new element of information about the scenario to prompt discussion among the participants. Observations made by the participants, either in response to questions by the facilitator, or as comments following observations by other stakeholders, were noted by the support contractor team. The discussion was not captured by transcript, and no attempt was made to identify the commenter other than with respect to the participant's stakeholder group.

Discussion proceeded throughout each phase of the exercise, with the notation of summary observations by participants. At the end of the exercise, the exercise facilitator led a hotwash discussion to capture the summary comments of the participants. Observations offered by the exercise participants during the hotwash were also documented as previously described.

EXERCISE PARTICIPANT EVALUATION FORM COMMENTS

Sixteen of the 20 players (80% of participants) completed an exercise evaluation form. Their feedback is summarized below.

Strengths of the Exercise

Overall

- The majority of the participants stated that the exercise was helpful. Respondents to the evaluation felt that the exercise was an excellent way to bring the stakeholders together for a discussion about how to coordinate a response during a human pandemic.
- Consumer Group and Industry stakeholder participants agreed that FSIS should sponsor a follow-up exercise focusing on appropriate messaging to consumers during a pandemic.

Areas for Improvement

Injects

- Some participants felt that the injects should include a second wave of pandemic flu to stimulate a discussion about how the stakeholders would prepare in between outbreaks.

Expand the Participant List

- Many participants stated that the exercise should be expanded to include representatives from the Food and Drug Administration, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Customs and Border Patrol, Health and Human Services, Local Agencies and State and local government agencies.

Logistics and Materials

- Two participants asked for FSIS to use audio visuals to set up the scenario and make the scenario more authentic.
- Several participants asked for FSIS to include a summary of USDA's human pandemic planning for stakeholders outside the agency.
- One participant asked FSIS to hold a forum where stakeholders share the messages they would prepare for the public in the event of a pandemic.
- Another participant asked to include more than one person from each FSIS program area. Select those that would be more involved during the actual situation.

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- One participant stated that there should be more time in the exercise to review the meaning of each stage.

APPENDIX A

Flu for Thought II—Participant List

Name	Affiliation	Email	Phone
Kathy Bernard	USDA-Food Safety and Inspection Service	kathy.bernard@fsis.usda.gov	301-344-4746
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APPENDIX B

Agenda

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Human Influenza Pandemic Exercise

November 6, 2008

USDA South Building – Room S-310
Washington DC

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| 8:45 AM | Registration |
| 9:15 AM | Welcome and Opening Remarks |
| 9:20 AM | Exercise Overview |
| 9:30 AM | Phase 1 – Pre-Pandemic Planning (<i>Stages 0-2</i>) |
| 10:15 AM | Break |
| 10:30 AM | Phase 2 – Pre-pandemic Preparations (<i>Stages 3-4</i>) |
| 11:30 AM | Lunch |
| 12:30 PM | Phase 3 – Response (<i>Stage 5</i>) |
| 1:30 PM | Phase 4 – Recovery All Areas (<i>Stage 6</i>) |
| 2:15 PM | Break |
| 2:30 PM | Summary |
| 3:00 PM | Adjourn |