

Section 9: Communications

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I. Overview

Effective communication of key messages to all audiences will be critical to successful implementation of a public health response to pandemic flu. Confirmation of a pandemic flu strain will require comprehensive public information strategies to address the communication needs of various target audiences. This section will detail audiences, messages, strategies and communications channels that will be utilized to provide effective public information and risk communication in the event of an influenza pandemic. This section will also include information for responding to highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) strains in New York with potential to spread to humans, even if they have not developed pandemic potential. Importantly, this section begins by delineating preparedness messages that will set the stage for an effective pandemic response.

Speed of communication is critical: The first message disseminated sets the stage for all future communications and speed of response is perceived as a reflection of the agency's preparedness. Factual content of the message is also crucial: The public will want information and a recommendation for action steps to reduce their risk. Public concerns should be treated as legitimate and recognized for their ability to influence effectiveness of a pandemic response. Arguably, effective public communication can help hasten containment of an outbreak and mitigate social and economic consequences. At a minimum, ineffective or delayed public communication will inevitably make the situation worse.

II. Objectives

During the Interpandemic and Pandemic Alert Periods (*Investigation/Recognition Intervals*):

State Health Department:

- Develop and/or obtain informational materials to begin to normalize such activities as hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene, staying home if you are sick, stocking up on necessary supplies.
- Develop and test pre-pandemic communication products to expedite delivery of public information should a pandemic strain emerge.
- Provide informational materials for use during "town meetings" to educate the public about pandemic influenza and their crucial role.

State and Local Health Departments:

- Alert the public to their own critical role in pandemic preparedness and response; reinforce the message that in a severe pandemic, actions of individuals, businesses and community organizations, as much as those of government, will greatly determine the outcome.

- Stress that preparing for and responding to a pandemic is not something that state or local health officials or local elected leaders can do alone—pandemic planning must be everybody’s business.
- Employ social marketing strategies to normalize risk reduction behaviors such as hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
- Provide public information and education on appropriate use of masks.
- Provide public information on the importance of keeping children with symptoms of influenza-like illness home from school.
- Collaborate with appropriate state agencies to provide information about pandemic preparedness and response to schools and day care providers.
- Identify or enhance alternate communication channels that can be used to help reach Special Needs Population (SNP) groups, who otherwise may be unwilling to act upon official health directives in a pandemic, e.g., migrant workers, undocumented aliens, rural isolated individuals, homeless individuals. Such alternate channels may include faith community leaders, community based organizations and other trusted sources.
- Foster opportunities for public engagement regarding characteristics and challenges of an influenza pandemic that include representation by members of SNP groups.
- Communicate with local health departments and the provider community through alternate channels such as the HIN, HPN, HERDS and professional/industry organizations.
- Provide clear information to distinguish between the difference in human risk of HPAI in New York and an influenza pandemic.

Local Health Departments:

- With local preparedness partners, conduct town meetings to educate communities about pandemic influenza and the public’s crucial role.
- Continue to develop alternative communication channels to reach SNP groups.

Pandemic Period (*Initiation, Resolution, Recovery Intervals*):

State Health Department:

- Continue to communicate with local health departments and the provider community through alternate channels such as the HIN, HPN, HERDS and professional/industry organizations.

- Continue to communicate with other State agencies and key external communications partners.

State and Local Health Departments:

- Utilize public information protocols to provide rapid, accurate information about the situation and the public health response to build trust and enhance agency credibility. Appendices 9-A and 9-B delineate NYSDOH's model for an emergency public information structure and public information resources.
- Provide factual information that will help the public assess the extent of the risk to themselves and their families (see Appendix 9-C for templates that can be utilized by all key communications partners).
- Provide information about who is eligible to receive vaccine and/or antiviral medications.
- Communicate recommended action steps to help the public reduce their risk of illness or death in the absence of, or as an adjunct to, vaccine and antiviral medications.
- Provide public information and education on community containment strategies to reduce disease transmission.
- Communicate travel advisories.
- Provide information on risk reduction strategies for individuals who use mass transit.
- Continue to provide public information and education on appropriate use of masks.
- Use communications strategies that will address the issue of "worried well."
- Provide information to help people take care of sick family members at home.
- Provide information about what people should do to disinfect their homes.
- Provide information about what employers should do to disinfect the workplace.
- Provide a mechanism to update information on a regular basis, and as the pandemic status changes.
- Update risk reduction guidance between and during subsequent pandemic "waves" to reflect current circumstances.
- Provide psycho-social risk communication messages to help foster a return to community resilience.

Local Health Departments:

- Provide targeted information to previously identified Special Needs Populations within the jurisdiction.

Include tribal nations and/or foreign missions within the jurisdiction in the distribution list of public messages aimed at risk reduction.

III. Public Information/Risk Communication Activities

A. Pre-Pandemic Communication Interpandemic and Pandemic Alert Periods (Investigation, Recognition Intervals):

The word “pandemic” likely engenders an atmosphere of uncertainty among many members of the public. If public concern is high (even though the actual degree of risk may be low) an “information inoculation” can do a great deal to help alleviate fears. This must occur pre-event, to minimize distractions from “mental noise” and to help the public better understand their own, crucial role in pandemic preparedness and response. Risk communication research suggests that worried people respond better if they are provided with up-to-date factual information, coupled with action steps that permit them some measure of control over their own health and safety. Ideally, risk communication should begin when the target audience is attentive to the message, but not so overwhelmed by psychological or physical communication barriers that they cannot or will not receive, understand and/or act on the message. Therefore, it will be necessary to communicate information about human health risks associated with an influenza pandemic well before emergence of any pandemic strains that represent a threat of large scale human-to-human transmission. Particular emphasis should be placed on the distinction between a pandemic (a global influenza epidemic caused by a novel flu virus easily transmitted person-to-person) and the currently low risk of human illness associated with HPAI. New York State Health Department activities will include:

- An expanded social marketing campaign stressing hand washing and respiratory hygiene to be carried out during “normal” flu seasons.
- Linking individual and family pandemic preparedness to All Hazards preparedness.
- Development of communications products about an influenza pandemic (including, but not limited to, press releases, PSAs, fact sheets), and information resources (radio/TV messages and emergency instructions that can be localized, web pages and links to additional credible information about HPAI and pandemic flu, etc.) that will be approved ahead of time. Print materials will be maintained in both web-based/CD-ROM and hard copy versions.
- Testing and evaluation of communication products, and, as necessary revision of same.

- Establishment of and/or maintain capacity for a public “call center” that can be rapidly activated to provide information in the event of HPAI or an influenza pandemic and ensuring that call center operators can provide risk communication along with public information.
- Maintaining capacity for rapid, interactive communication with key partners, including public health information officers across the nation via the National Public Health Information Coalition and continuing outreach to public information/risk communication staff representing health departments in New York City, Connecticut, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Vermont and Pennsylvania.

With HPAI and/or during the Interpandemic and Pandemic Alert Periods, NYSDOH will utilize defined public information protocols, and as necessary, alternate communication channels to address the information needs of various target audiences:

- Members of the media;
- General public;
- Business community;
- Elected leaders;
- Faith community/trusted leaders;
- Special populations;
- Local health departments (LHDs);
- Healthcare providers;
- NYSDOH employees;
- Other State agencies.

Specific communication tactics and channels to address these separate and distinct audiences are described below.

Media: During Interpandemic and Pandemic Alert Periods, the NYSDOH Public Affairs Group (PAG) will be the single point of contact within the Department for media inquiries about pandemic influenza and for questions about human risks associated with HPAI. The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM) will be the point of contact for media inquiries about non-human animal HPAI. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) will also be the point of contact for information about their wild bird triage system for HPAI testing.

Because of the anticipated volume of media inquiries, background information on pandemic flu and HPAI preparedness and response will be posted on the NYSDOH public website and will be updated on a continuing basis. Current press releases, public service announcements and incident-specific updates will also be posted.

Outreach regarding pandemic preparedness will be conducted with media managers.

General Public: Public information targeted to the general public will be disseminated during Interpandemic and Pandemic Alert Periods through a variety of communication channels:

- Via media reports generated by press releases, briefings and/or interviews;
- Via public service announcements (paid advertisements, as necessary, coupled with donated airtime);
- Via controlled advertising, e.g. pandemic preparedness DVD, brochures, flyers, posters and other educational materials.
- Via the NYSDOH website and links to other appropriate web-based information (e.g., websites at NYSDAM, SEMO, USDA, CDC, pandemicflu.gov);
- Through referrals to the NYSDOH public call center, as circumstances dictate.

The purpose of pre-event communications to the general public is to alert them of the crucial role they will play in pandemic preparedness and response, and to establish a candid and open dialogue about expected limitations on government resources during a severe pandemic.

Business Community: Public information will be provided explaining how a pandemic could affect day-to-day operations of every business sector, and the importance of continuity of operations planning. Special emphasis will be placed on discouraging employee “presenteeism.”

Elected Leaders: Information targeted to elected leaders during Interpandemic and Pandemic Alert Periods will be disseminated through interactions coordinated by the NYSDOH Office of Governmental Affairs. It will be especially important, pre-event, to provide education on principles of risk communication and evidence-based best practices for communicating with the public during an outbreak, e.g.:

- Build trust;
- Announce early;
- Be transparent;
- Respect public concerns.

Special Populations: Interpandemic and Pandemic Alert Periods public information targeted to special populations (e.g., persons with disabilities, non-English speakers) will use informational materials and channels most appropriate to the needs of the target audience. To the extent possible, messages will be prepared and tested, pre-event.

NYSDOH will consult with opinion leaders and members of the Department’s Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication workgroup to explore cultural issues that could be relevant to pandemic communications and maintain and/or enhance communication channels targeted at hard-to-reach SNP groups such as undocumented immigrants, homeless individuals, etc.

We will produce information in low literacy format (6th grade reading level coupled with illustrations) as well as materials that utilize pictograms to assist individuals who do not speak English through a mass dispensing site. We will also provide information to schools and day care centers to help educate parents, teachers and caregivers on pandemic issues that could especially affect children.

Faith Community: Because the faith community assumes a “trusted leader” role for many SNP groups, we will conduct outreach to educate faith community representatives on the characteristics and challenges of pandemic influenza and determine their specific public information/risk communication needs, along with those of their primary community partners.

Local Health Departments: During the Interpandemic and Pandemic Alert Periods, NYSDOH will communicate regularly with local health departments to coordinate communications planning and enhance message consistency. This will be accomplished primarily via interactions with the New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO) and through use of the secure Health Commerce System.

As part of pre-event planning, LHDs should make provisions to disseminate pandemic public information in a manner that promotes consistent messaging (e.g., making arrangements to handle a high volume of calls from the public and healthcare providers).

Healthcare Providers: During the Interpandemic and Pandemic Alert Periods, efforts will be made to promote use by health care providers of the secure Health Commerce System—Health Alert Network, Health Provider Network and Health Emergency Response Data System (HERDS)—which will be primary channels for provider information. Other provider information will be disseminated via

- Postings on the NYSDOH public website;
- Bulk e-mail;
- “Dear Administrator” letters;
- Distribution to professional associations including the Medical Society of the State of New York (MSSNY); New York State Nurses’ Association (NYSNA); New York State Veterinary Medical Society (NYVMS); Home Care Association of New York State; and the Greater New York Hospital Association (GNYHA), among others.

NYSDOH Employees: During the interpandemic and pandemic alert periods, Department staff will be notified of any significant health information via Lotus NEWS items and the DOH Insider web page. As appropriate, these will contain links to additional information resources.

Other State Agencies: During the interpandemic and pandemic alert periods, employees of other state agencies will be notified of any significant health information via the Governor’s Office of Employee Relations, which will receive regular updates from DOH.

B. Pandemic Period Communications (*Initiation, Resolution, Recovery Intervals*)::

To communicate factual information rapidly to further enhance credibility and trust in a Pandemic Period, NYSDOH will:

- Utilize risk communication principles;
- Utilize web-based communications;
- Maximize media relations;
- Activate a call center for the general public;
- Activate a provider helpline;
- Designate spokespersons and subject matter experts;
- Expedite the clearance process for release of information;
- Participate in a Joint Information Center (JIC) as appropriate.

Specific strategies for accomplishing the last three activities are described below.

Spokespersons and Subject Matter Experts

The State Health Commissioner, or his/her designee, will be the primary spokesperson regarding emergency health issues related to pandemic flu and for issues related to the human health risk of HPAI.

Content experts representing the Office of Public Health, Division of Epidemiology, Bureau of Communicable Disease Control; Immunization Program, Zoonoses Program, Office of Science, Office of Health Systems Management, Office of Long Term Care, and Wadsworth Laboratory will support the primary spokesperson(s) and may serve as secondary spokespersons if their specific expertise is required.

NYSDOH also will seek third party verification from appropriate external public information partners who have been pre-identified.

Information Release and Joint Information Center

During a Pandemic Period, to update public information and provide recommended action steps in a timely manner, NYSDOH will facilitate expedited review and clearance of communication products, share public messages with key communication partners and participate in a Joint Information Center (JIC). The purpose of a JIC will be to facilitate a one-voice response; serve as the clearinghouse for accurate, timely information; and enhance the dissemination of health information essential to an effective health emergency response.

- All information materials for public dissemination will be cleared through the appropriate Bureau, Division and Center and Office. Once office clearance is obtained, the material will be forwarded to the Director of PAG for review and then to the Office of the Commissioner for signoff.

- The decision to release public information will be coordinated with the Governor’s Office of Communications (Press Office), as will a decision to establish a JIC.
- A JIC will be coordinated by SEMO with the participation of NYSDOH, NYSDAM, NYSDEC, and other state and local agencies, as appropriate. Establishment of a JIC will be critical if New York State has HPAI affecting both human and animal species. The Director of Public Affairs will designate which public information officer(s) will be assigned to a JIC, based on the nature of information to be released and the PIO’s area of expertise. Regular Public Affairs Group “Call Down/Call Back” staffing rosters and procedures will be followed in deployment of personnel to a JIC.
- A JIC will be located at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at SEMO. An alternative, “virtual” JIC or “near site” JIC location will be considered, according to the specifics of the emergency and the needs of the media.

Target audiences

Some target audiences will be expanded during a Pandemic Period, and enhanced tactics and channels will be utilized to address the increased public information and risk communication needs of:

- Members of the media;
- General public;
- Business community;
- Elected leaders;
- Special populations;
- Faith Community;
- Local health departments;
- Healthcare providers;
- NYSDOH employees;
- Other State agencies;
- Travelers; and
- Foreign missions.

Media: The media will be the primary information resource for all target audiences during a Pandemic Period. It must be recognized that the media will play an essential role in creating an informed public. However, inaccurate or exaggerated press reports can fuel public concern far in excess of an actual health risk. Thus, there must be a constant source of timely “official” public information to reduce rumors that otherwise will quickly fill an information vacuum. To ensure message accuracy and coordination, during a pandemic period, NYSDOH PAG will continue as the single point of contact within the Department for media inquiries.

PAG press office staff will be available to assist with press calls, and risk communication staff, with Bureau of Health Media and Marketing staff as backup, will be available to take messages for callbacks, and/or direct reporters to alternate sources of information (e.g., the Department’s website, press releases, fact sheets, etc).

Because of the anticipated volume of media inquiries, regular updates on pandemic influenza incidence and the New York State response will be posted on the NYSDOH public website upon the direction of PAG. Press releases, fact sheets, public service announcements and incident-specific updates, such as travel advisories, will also be posted.

PAG will coordinate media briefings and provide access to spokespersons/Subject Matter Experts in consultation with the Governor's Office of Communications (Press Office). PAG and/or risk communication staff will participate in a JIC at the direction of the Press Office. General media, ethnic media and special audiences will be accommodated at news briefings. If social distancing is necessary, telebriefings may be substituted for media availabilities/press conferences. Should there be a need for mass prophylaxis at a State Point of Dispensing; an opportunity will be provided for media members to cover the event via pooled coverage.

Media monitoring will occur continually, and incorrect or outdated information will be corrected without delay.

General Public: Public information targeted to the general public will be disseminated through a variety of communication channels:

- Via media reports generated by press releases, briefings and/or interviews;
- Via public service announcements (paid advertisements, as necessary, coupled with donated airtime);
- Via the NYSDOH website and links to other appropriate web-based information (e.g. CDC website, SEMO website);
- Via outreach to the faith community and other trusted leaders; and
- Through referrals to the NYSDOH public call center.

Business Community: Information targeted to the business community will be channeled through the Business Council and regional and local chambers of commerce. Messages will stress the importance of reducing the spread of germs by encouraging employees to stay home if they have flu-like symptoms, sending them home if they report to work sick, establishing alternate work schedules and taking other measures, such as meeting via teleconference or video conference, that minimize direct employee interaction.

Elected Leaders: Information targeted to elected leaders will be disseminated through regular briefings and interactions coordinated by the NYSDOH Office of Governmental Affairs.

Special Populations: Public information targeted to special populations during a Pandemic period will be disseminated in various languages other than English, such as Spanish, Russian, Chinese and Haitian-Creole; low-literacy versions; and unique versions for persons with disabilities. Local news and advertising media (newspapers, television and radio) will be used to disseminate specific emergency response information. Communication strategies will also target community opinion leaders and trusted sources to employ as alternate information channels for hard-to-reach special populations.

Faith Community: Psycho-social risk communication outreach and/or third party verification will be directed at faith leaders through existing Faith Based Organization contact lists (NYSDOH AIDS Institute Faith Community Initiative; CERC FBO mailing list) and through dissemination to LHDs to forward to community trusted leaders.

LHD Staff: During a pandemic period, NYSDOH will communicate regularly with LHDs. This will be accomplished primarily via continued interactions with NYSACHO and through use of the secure Health Commerce System. Designated LHD staff will access information through the Health Information Network (HIN), Communications directory, telephone briefings, bulk fax and/or e-mail.

Healthcare Providers: Specific diagnostic and treatment information will be provided during a Pandemic period to medical and other health professionals. Communication channels will include bulk fax and e-mail, the HPN, HERDS, professional associations, direct mail and the customary mass media channels. Special efforts should be directed at primary care providers and urgent care “Walk In” practices, which will be on the front lines of patient interactions. During a pandemic period, an in-house “provider helpline” will be staffed by NYSDOH experts to assist public health officials or medical personnel who need technical information about pandemic influenza. This call center will serve as a backup to LHDs which will be the first line of contact for healthcare providers in their jurisdictions.

NYSDOH Employees: Particularly during a pandemic period, individuals who work for the Department will be regarded by their neighbors, friends and family as “informed sources” of information. Providing them with timely, accurate and essential information will create a channel for effective inter-personal communications. To foster information/education for Department employees, PAG and risk communication staff will partner with human resources to enhance internal communications, e.g., by posting updates on DOH NEWS, and the Department’s “Insider” intranet site, distributing print materials with paychecks, consulting with Employee Assistance Program staff on psychosocial issues that may affect individuals’ willingness to follow risk reduction advice, using the Emergency Contact Database, and/or other strategies as dictated by ongoing circumstances.

Other State Agencies: NYSDOH will retain information on state agency contacts for pandemic flu preparedness and will provide timely information to these individuals via the Communication Directory alert and/or bulk messaging tools.

Travelers: NYSDOH will provide travelers’ advisories and information about risk reduction via the media, the internet and as appropriate, by utilizing controlled advertising, e.g., bus cards, shelter advertising, hard copy materials positioned at highway rest areas, bus terminals and railroad stations. Information also will be distributed to the Hospitality and Tourism Association of New York State and to Travelers Aid Societies in Albany, and New York City.

Foreign missions: Pandemic information to foreign missions will be provided by the local health department within whose jurisdiction the entity resides. The only foreign missions within New York State are located in New York City. NYSDOH will ask the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to apprise the Department of any public information

provided to foreign missions and share with us any press releases, fact sheets, etc. developed for this purpose.

IV. Conclusion

The public is entitled to early, accurate information that affects their health and that of their families. All pandemic communication strategies and activities will support the goal of enhancing public trust and confidence by announcing early, including establishing a candid and open dialogue with the public pre-event; acknowledging uncertainty; and withholding false reassurance. During a pandemic, emphasis will be given to providing timely, consistent and updated communication to promote risk reduction behaviors and accelerate outbreak control.

V. Activities by WHO Pandemic Period and CDC Pandemic Interval

The following section describes the activities to be undertaken by pandemic period for each objective described above.

Interpandemic and Pandemic Alert Periods (*Investigation, Recognition Intervals*):

State Health Department:

- Establish and maintain partnerships with public information staff from state, regional and local government agencies; hospitals and hospital industry organizations and human needs organizations.
- Facilitate risk communication training opportunities for key public information partners.
- Promote pneumococcal vaccination.
- Develop and test public information messages.
- Promote awareness of activities that will allow people to “shelter in place,” if necessary, e.g.:
 - Have a three-week supply of food and water and non-perishable foods in your home;
 - Have a well stocked first aid kit, including medications to reduce fever and pain, and a fever thermometer;
 - Have a wind up or battery operated radio or TV.
- Post information about novel influenza strain on the Department’s public website. If avian influenza strain is identified in birds in NYS, consider activities listed under pandemic period below to alleviate public alarm and appropriately respond to human health concerns about potential contact with infected animals.
- Provide information updates to LHD staff and health care providers via Health Commerce System and to NYSDOH employees via Lotus News or similar internal communication channel.

State and Local Health Departments:

- Maintain contact information for key public information partners.
- Utilize social marketing to normalize risk reduction behaviors.

- Alert the public about their own critical role and foster opportunities for public engagement.
- Identify SNPs who are hard to reach and alternate channels of communication in addition to mass media.
- Utilize designated spokespersons and/or subject matter experts to conduct media interviews.
- Provide summaries of updated information to key public information partners.
- Post information updates on the public website.
- Establish and/or maintain capacity for a public call center.

Pandemic Period (*Initiation, Resolution, Recovery Intervals*)

State Health Department:

- Participate in risk communication conference calls, monitor HHS/CDC telebriefings, and share information with other states via the National Public Health Information Coalition.
- Notify the general public of a specific health threat to New York State at the direction of the Governor or Commissioner of Health.
- Make public announcements regarding an influenza pandemic via the Governor, State Health Commissioner or their designated spokespersons.
- Disseminate protective action messages via Emergency Alert System (EAS) channels that will provide basic information about the emergency and refer viewers/listeners to additional sources of information.
- Prepare public notices and ensure they are reviewed by the appropriate executive and program staff, and, as necessary, the Governor’s press office.
- Notify the news media of health issues related to pandemic influenza. PAG will disseminate information via bulk faxing to news agencies and/or via email and post news releases on the DOH web site.
- In the event of a need for mass prophylaxis, utilize EAS channels, the NYSDOH website and other media channels to announce the availability/locations of vaccination sites or other protective actions being recommended.

State and Local Health Departments:

- Coordinate risk communication with key partners to enhance message consistency.
- Participate in a JIC, if one is established, and/or schedule regular media briefings and/or telebriefings.
- Activate public call center and provider helpline.
- Provide call center operators with specific messaging for “worried well” including information about how to care for influenza patients at home.
- Continue to promote pneumococcal vaccination.
- Communicate travel advisories.
- Reinforce community containment messages throughout all pandemic intervals, including recovery period.
- Reinforce respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene, mask usage and stay at home messages throughout all pandemic intervals, including recovery period.

- Update respiratory etiquette, hand hygiene and stay at home messages in conjunction with reopening of schools/cessation of other community containment measures.
- Provide psycho-social risk communication to foster a return to community resilience.

Health Emergency Public Information Response Roles

Public Information Roles and Responsibilities:

Public Affairs Group Direction: Provide overall leadership for all NYSDOH public information activities related to the emergency including media relations health education campaigns, coordination with the Governor's press office and other state agency PIOs and web based public information.

Media Relations: Respond to inquiries from reporters.

Health Media and Marketing Direction: Oversee creation of social marketing activities to support NYSDOH emergency response.

Communication Production Services: Direct the design and print production of materials to support NYSDOH response.

Public Website: Create and maintain web-based informational materials to support DOH response and inform public regarding ways to reduce risk.

Staff:

Public Affairs Group Direction: Director of Public Affairs: Associate Director

Media Relations: Public Information Officers (3); speechwriter; marketing specialist; administrative assistants (3).

Health Media and Marketing Direction: Director Bureau of Health Media and Marketing; Health Education Media Specialists; Purchasing agent; administrative assistants (2)

Communication Production Services: Director Bureau of CPS; graphic designers; Purchasing agent; print shop staff; administrative assistant

Public Website: Director; web programmers.

Public Health Risk Communication Roles and Responsibilities:

Director of Public Health Risk Communication, Office of Science (.40)
Provide guidance on principles of crisis emergency risk communication (CERC) to department spokespersons and key partners; advise on messaging. Work with Risk Communication staff within the Public Affairs Group on issues related to pandemic influenza preparedness and response.

New York State Department of Health Emergency Public Information System

Commissioner of Health → Governor's Office of Communications
Chief of Staff

NYSDOH Communication Leadership Team:

Director of Public Affairs
Director, Office of Science
Director, Office of Public Health
Director, Health Emergency Preparedness Program
Director, Office of Health Systems Management
Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Specialist, Office of Science
Director, Training and Education-Health Emergency Preparedness Program

Media Team:

Director of Public Affairs
Associate Director, PAG
Public Affairs Group press office staff

Information Management Team:

Director, Information Systems and Health Statistics Group
Public Health Informatics Coordinator
Health Commerce System staff

Health Education Team:

Director, Bureau of Health Media and Marketing
Director, Bureau of Communications Productions Services
Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication staff
BHMM staff

Public Health & Healthcare Provider Communications Team:

HEP Program Director of Training and Education
Healthcare Preparedness program staff
Director, Bureau of Health Media and Marketing
Director, Bureau of Communications Productions Services
Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication staff

Web Team:

Associate Director, PAG
Public website director
Public website programmers

Public Response Line Team:

Director, BCDC
Assistant Director, BCDC
Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication staff
BHMM staff

New York State Department of Health Pandemic Flu Shelf Kit

NOTE TO USERS:

This Pandemic Influenza “Shelf Kit” is designed to provide you with practical tools that will help you to quickly provide public information in the event of an influenza pandemic. Its contents include many sample documents such as news releases, talking points and message maps that may be adapted to your local needs. To the extent possible, they have been created in “Fill-in-the-Blank” template format to allow for inclusion of event-specific information. Even so, in a real situation, some revision may be necessary to assure accuracy as facts emerge.

Although confirmation of highly pathogenic H5N1 Avian Flu virus in birds in the United States—when it occurs—will not herald the arrival of pandemic influenza, this will likely create renewed media interest and public confusion. Therefore, a news release template and talking points concerning this issue is included in this kit.

MESSAGE MAP: AVIAN FLU		
<i>ISSUE: PANDEMIC FLU</i>		
STAKEHOLDER:		
GENERAL PUBLIC		
<i>QUESTION OR CONCERN:</i>		
Avian Flu Confirmed in NY Birds		
Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
H5N1 avian influenza (bird flu) has been confirmed in (event specific) birds in NYS	This does NOT mean that people will get sick	There are things to do to protect yourself
Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
The discovery was made (event specific, when/where)	Bird flu rarely affects humans, because it requires <u>close contact</u> with infected birds	Don't handle any wild birds or poultry with your bare hands
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
Officials are moving fast to limit the spread of avian flu in birds	Officials are watching closely for any increase in flu-like illnesses, just as a precaution	Don't attract wild birds with bird feeders or bird baths
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3
Outbreaks of a less severe strain of avian influenza in birds have occurred previously in the US and have been contained	There have been no cases of this strain of avian influenza in people in NYS	ALWAYS cook poultry thoroughly and wash your hands and any surfaces that have come into contact with raw poultry.

HIGHLY PATHOGENIC H5N1 AVIAN INFLUENZA CONFIRMED IN UNITED STATES

Birds in New York State [HAVE/HAVE NOT] been found to infected, to date

[LOCATION, NY, DATE]—Federal and State officials now confirm the presence of highly pathogenic H5N1 Avian Influenza (HPAI) in the United States. The virus responsible for [CURRENT #] of human “Bird Flu” cases in Asia and Africa was discovered in [# AND SPECIES OF BIRDS] collected from [LOCATION/STATE] on [DATE]. The birds were tested at [NAME OF LABORATORY] and preliminary and confirmatory testing now shows they were infected with HPAI.

Based on the finding, surveillance for HPAI in wild birds and domestic poultry, and potential human cases of H5N1 Avian Influenza will increase in New York State. The state departments of Health, Agriculture and Markets and Environmental Conservation are leading this effort.

Health officials stress that the presence of HPAI in the United States does NOT mean an increased risk of pandemic flu. In its present form, the bird flu virus is not easily spread from one person to another. However, humans can get the virus after close contact with infected birds, so sensible precautions should be taken.

“We understand people’s concern that a new and potentially dangerous virus has surfaced in our country. It’s important to remember that bird flu is not the same thing as pandemic flu. A pandemic flu virus would spread easily—bird flu does not,” [NAME/TITLE OF OFFICIAL] said. “There is no pandemic flu virus anywhere in the world at this time. There are things you can do to protect yourself from bird flu. Learn about them, and make them a habit for yourself and your family.”

Avoid handling wild birds

It is possible for some birds to be infected with HPAI but show no or only mild symptoms. People who have close contact with wild birds, like researchers and wildlife rehabilitators, should protect themselves using some basic sanitary practices. Do not pick up dead or sick birds and animals unless you have been trained in handling animals. Anyone who does come into contact with a dead or sick bird or animal should always wear gloves and wash their hands thoroughly afterwards.

If you must pick up a sick or dead bird—for instance one that has landed on your doorstep—wear gloves and use a shovel to move it. Wash your hands immediately with soap and water after removing gloves.

Follow local instructions about reporting dead birds

[INSERT EVENT SPECIFIC INFORMATION HERE]

Know what to do about backyard birds

HPAI generally involves migratory waterfowl and domestic poultry, not backyard birds such as robins, sparrows, cardinals and the like. [THEREFORE/HOWEVER] at this time officials [ARE NOT/ARE] recommending that you discontinue feeding backyard birds. [IF FEEDING CAN CONTINUE INSERT THE FOLLOWING] Remember, it is important to clean birdbaths and bird feeders.

- Bird feeders should be cleaned monthly with a solution of nine parts water to one part bleach to help get rid of bacteria and mold spores in plastic, ceramic and metal feeders.
- A solution of three parts water to one part vinegar or unscented biodegradable soap can be used on wooden bird feeders.
- Also, sweep away and discard droppings and seed hulls from around the base of feeders

Avoid bird droppings

Because many different bacteria, parasites and viruses—including the HPAI virus—can be present in bird droppings, it is best to avoid exposure to them at all times. The following precautions should be taken:

- Teach children to avoid playing in places where there are many visible droppings and always wash their hands after playing outside.
- If you pick up droppings, use a shovel, "pooper scooper," or gloves – never your bare hands.
- If you are worried about exposure during swimming, swim at a regulated beach, where regular tests are conducted to make sure the water is not polluted from human, animal or farm waste.

If you have pet birds

Learn the warning signs of avian influenza in birds -- breathing problems, watery diarrhea, and swelling around the head, neck, and eyes. Do not handle a bird that is showing any of these signs and call your veterinarian.

- Buy birds from reputable sources and ensure that you have documentation of your new bird's origin. Smuggled birds could be a source of avian influenza, as well as other serious avian diseases.
- Be sure that you get your new birds checked by a veterinarian.
- Keep your birds and areas around them clean and keep your birds away from other birds.

Do not allow your pets to roam free

Pets can become infected with HPAI by consuming dead animals and may be able to pass the virus to their human companions. Control your pet to limit its possible exposure to infected birds.

Implications for hunters

Hunters are advised to [DISCONTINUE HUNTING WATERFOWL, OUT OF AN ABUNDANCE OF CAUTION/ TAKE SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS WHEN HUNTING WATERFOWL:

- Do not handle obviously sick birds or birds found dead.
- Keep your game birds cool, clean and dry.
- Do not eat, drink or smoke while cleaning harvested waterfowl.
- Wear rubber gloves when cleaning waterfowl.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after cleaning waterfowl.
- Clean up tools and surfaces immediately with hot, soapy water and disinfect with a mixture of 10 percent household chlorine bleach in water.
- Thoroughly cook harvested waterfowl (165° Fahrenheit).]

Implication for hobby poultry farmers

Enhanced bio-security measures within the commercial poultry industry in the United States greatly reduce the risk of HPAI in commercial flocks. Hobbyists, or backyard poultry farmers, should follow advice from the United States Department of Agriculture, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and/or their local Cornell Cooperative Extension Office to protect their birds and themselves from the virus. If you raise poultry in your back yard, it is very important that you call your local or state authorities or the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) toll-free – 1-866-536-7593 if your farm birds are sick. When disposing of a dead bird, be sure to wear gloves, use a plastic bag, and wash your hands afterwards.

Food safety

“I’m sure people are wondering if it is safe to eat poultry products now that the HPAI virus has been detected in the United States,” [NAME/TITLE OF OFFICIAL] said. “All store-bought poultry has met safety standards because it is processed under federal or state inspection. The majority of U.S. poultry is raised in very secure poultry houses, which significantly decreases the possibility of contact with other birds, animals, or people. To further ensure the safety of the U.S. food supply, the USDA also prohibits the importation of poultry and poultry products from countries and/or regions where virus has been detected in commercial or traditionally raised flocks (not wild birds).”

[OFFICIAL] noted that people have the power to protect themselves - properly prepared and cooked poultry is safe to eat. Always follow these basic common-sense practices in order to protect yourself from any food borne germs:

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Prevent cross contamination by keeping raw poultry meat and its juices away from other foods.
- Cook all poultry to an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit. This kills food borne germs that might be present, such as the HPAI virus.

For more information visit [LOCAL WEBSITE,] www.avianflu.gov or www.nyhealth.gov.

***KEY MESSAGES FOR AVIAN INFLUENZA: HPAI H5N1 DETECTION IN U.S.**

This HPAI detection does NOT signal the start of a human flu pandemic.

Human illness from HPAI H5N1 overseas has resulted predominantly from direct contact with sick or dead birds. There is no evidence that this virus is spread easily from person to person.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and state and local health officials are watching closely for any sign the virus has changed into a form that can more easily infect people. Officials will be very transparent about any new developments.

Work is underway to eliminate HPAI from the United States.

With a commercial poultry outbreak, USDA will activate its response plan that includes five key steps: quarantine, eradicate, monitor, disinfect, and test. Specifically, USDA will:

- 1) Secure the affected poultry farm(s) and restrict movement of poultry and poultry equipment into and out of the control area;
- 2) Humanely euthanize all of the birds in any infected flock;
- 3) Maintain the control area until tests confirm the farm is AI-free;
- 4) Clean and disinfect the poultry houses and area after the birds have been depopulated; and
- 5) Test neighboring flocks and others in the area to quickly detect any spread.

With a wild bird outbreak: USDA will conduct extensive testing in the flyway of other wild birds, commercial poultry operations, and backyard flocks. Specifically, USDA will:

- 1) Coordinate enhanced wild bird surveillance in the surrounding area where the event occurred;
- 2) Monitor potential wild bird threats to domestic poultry and assess the risk wild birds pose to the transmission of a HPAI virus to susceptible livestock and poultry; and
- 3) Implement enhanced surveillance plan for domestic poultry.

USDA has a network of animal health experts and laboratories capable of assisting with testing and response to bird outbreaks. USDA has 600 veterinarians and 1,300 experts nationwide who are capable of assisting as well as a network of 39 states and academic laboratories nationwide that are approved to assist with testing bird samples.

Despite the detection of HPAI H5N1 in the United States, it is still safe to eat chicken and turkey bought at stores.

All store-bought poultry has met USDA safety standards because it is processed under federal or state inspection. The majority of U.S. poultry is raised in very secure poultry houses, which significantly decreases the possibility of contact with other birds, animals, or people. To further ensure the safety of the U.S. food supply, USDA also prohibits the importation of poultry and poultry products from countries and/or regions where HPAI H5N1 has been detected in commercial or traditionally raised flocks (not wild birds).

People have the power to protect themselves - properly prepared and cooked poultry is safe to eat.

Always follow these basic common-sense practices in order to protect yourself from any food borne pathogens:

- 1) Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food;
- 2) Prevent cross contamination by keeping raw poultry meat and its juices away from other foods; and
- 3) Cook all poultry to an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit. This kills food borne germs that might be present, such as the AI virus.

To protect yourself from any food borne causing germs, USDA recommends that you: wash hands and utensils before and after handling food; keep raw poultry meat and juices away from other food, and cook all poultry to an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit. This kills the bird flu virus and other germs such as, Salmonella and E. Coli.

Should you buy meat from a live bird market, it would be highly unlikely that infected poultry would be sold because of the rapid onset of symptoms in birds as well as the numerous safeguards in place, which include testing of flocks and Federal inspection programs.

If you raise poultry in your back yard, it is very important that you call your local or state authorities or USDA if your farm birds are sick.

The USDA toll-free number is 1-866-536-7593.

Learn the warning signs of avian influenza in birds -- breathing problems, watery diarrhea, and swelling around the head, neck, and eyes. Do not handle a bird that is showing any of these signs and call your veterinarian.

When disposing of a dead bird, be sure to wear gloves, use a plastic bag, and wash your hands afterwards.

People can protect themselves even if there are sick or dead birds nearby.

Report sick or dead birds to local or state authorities or the USDA wildlife services office in your state.

Do not touch sick or dead wild birds with your bare hands. If you come in contact with wild birds or droppings you should immediately wash your hands.

Hunters and backyard farmers should wear gloves when handling killed birds.

It is good practice to always disinfect gloves, tools, and materials that come into contact with killed birds. More information about reporting sick or dead birds, and disinfecting your gear is available at www.usda.gov/birdflu.

People who have pet birds should take precautions.

Learn the warning signs of avian influenza in birds -- breathing problems, watery diarrhea, and swelling around the head, neck, and eyes. Do not handle a bird that is showing any of these signs and call your veterinarian.

Buy birds from reputable sources and ensure that you have documentation of your new bird's origin. Smuggled birds could be a source of avian influenza, as well as other serious avian diseases.

Be sure that you get your new birds checked by a veterinarian.

Keep your birds and areas around them clean and keep your birds away from other birds.

If you have been around other birds, make sure that you clean your shoes, clothing, and other items. And don't forget to wash your hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling your birds.

Your pets may be susceptible to AI viruses.

Wild and domestic birds are the most susceptible to AI. But swine are susceptible to some AI viruses (usually H1 and H3). However, there is no evidence of HPAI H5N1 being transmitted from pig to pig or pig to human.

Cats, rabbits, ferrets, rodents, and some primates are susceptible to some AI viruses. Exposure can come from preying upon infected or sick birds and droppings, so do not allow pets to roam free. Exposure is more likely in outdoor animals of these species.

* Source: www.avianflu.gov

UNEXPLAINED FLU-LIKE ILLNESS TEMPLATE

**STATEMENT FROM [NAME OF OFFICIAL] ON INFLUENZA-LIKE ILLNESS
CASES IN [COUNTY]**

CITY/DATE—“The [AGENCY NAME] is investigating cases of influenza-like illness in [COUNTY]. The first cases occurred [DATE]. [#] individuals have been hospitalized with severe respiratory symptoms and [#] have died.

Samples have been requested for laboratory testing to try to identify the cause of illness. In addition to the hospitalized patients, we are receiving information about numerous cases of flu-like illness throughout the region. The New York State Department of Health will assist local health departments in investigating these cases.

We realize that people may be concerned about an unexpected occurrence of flu-like illness. This is understandable. Fortunately, there are many things we all can do to help protect ourselves and others from getting flu:

- Wash your hands frequently using soap and hot water. If you are not near a sink, use a waterless hand rub.
- Keep your hands away from your mouth, nose or eyes.
- Use a disinfectant on surfaces such as desktops, telephones, keyboards, etc. that many people handle.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, and discard it appropriately. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the bend of your arm—not your hand.
- Get sufficient rest and exercise, and eat well. This will help to enhance your immune system.
- Stay home if you have flu-like symptoms. Please—keep your germs to yourself!

Even though it is not unheard of for sporadic influenza to occur at any time of year, state and local health officials are working together to determine if the number or pattern of the current cases is unusual. Further information will be provided as soon as it is available.”

###

EVENT MESSAGE MAP: PANDEMIC FLU ARRIVES

ISSUE: PANDEMIC FLU

STAKEHOLDER:

GENERAL PUBLIC

QUESTION OR CONCERN:

What should the public know about an outbreak of pandemic flu?

Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
A worldwide outbreak of influenza virus has now reached New York State	Vaccine supply is limited, and additional vaccine may not be available for 3-6 months	We want to reduce contact and slow the spread of disease
Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
This flu is highly contagious and is spread by coughing and sneezing	Since vaccine supply is limited, only _____(Event specific) will receive the flu shot	We might have to close schools for up to 12 weeks and limit public gatherings
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
Past influenza pandemics have caused many serious illnesses and deaths so we must work together to try to stop the spread of this disease	It's vital that these people get vaccinated first because _____(Event specific)	To protect people who have not gotten sick, NYSDOH is using voluntary quarantine of members of households in which there is an infected member. These exposed individuals are recommended to stay home for 7 days after the time that the family member became ill.
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3
Cases have been reported in _____ counties	To reduce risk, do the following _____(Event specific, e.g. avoid close contact with the sick, wash hands often, cover your cough, bolster immune system, wear a mask in public, limit time spent in public, especially if you have flu symptoms)	Sick individuals must remain in isolation until _____ days after the end of fever

NOVEL VIRUS IDENTIFIED TEMPLATE

“NOVEL” INFLUENZA VIRUS IDENTIFIED BY STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT’S WADSWORTH CENTER LABORATORY

CITY/DATE—The New York State Department of Health’s Wadsworth Center Laboratory has confirmed a novel flu strain as the cause of illness of a [COUNTY] resident, [NAME OF OFFICIAL] announced. [INSERT INFORMATION ABOUT THE PATIENT’S CONDITION].

Wadsworth Center confirmed the strain based on [#] separate laboratory tests. Their findings were verified by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). To date, it is not known if the virus can spread through person to person contact. [IF ACCURATE, ADD However health officials are investigating whether the new virus could be responsible for an unusual amount of flu-like illness throughout region.]

[“NAME OF STRAIN] does appear to be a new type of flu that has never before circulated. That is what is meant by a “novel” virus. Although this situation is atypical, we can not know the extent of the possible impact at this time. We are working with the CDC to conduct and verify laboratory tests on additional patients, so that we can learn more as quickly as possible. Equally important, we are asking for residents of [COUNTY] to help us by taking steps to protect themselves and others, in case this virus is easily spread.”

According to [NAME OF OFFICIAL], there are many things we all can do to reduce our health risk:

- Stay home if you have flu-like symptoms. If you need health care, try to call ahead to your provider so you may be isolated from other patients.
- Ask for a mask when presenting for treatment so you will not infect others.
- Stay at least three feet away from persons with flu-like symptoms.
- Wash your hands frequently using soap and hot water. If you are not near a sink, use a waterless hand rub.
- Keep your hands away from your mouth, nose or eyes.
- Use a disinfectant on surfaces such as desktops, telephones, keyboards, etc. that many people handle.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, and discard it appropriately. If you don’t have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the bend of your arm—not your hand.
- Get sufficient rest and exercise, and eat well. This will help to enhance your immune system.

To date, a total of [#] persons have been hospitalized with influenza like symptoms in [COUNTY]. Cases [HAVE/HAVE NOT] been reported in other areas of the state.

“We are all concerned about this novel influenza virus. But I ask everyone to remain calm, stay informed and be assured that we will continue to do everything possible in response to the current situation.”

Health Officials are urging people not to call 911, unless they have a true emergency. “Do not rush to your doctor or hospital emergency room to get flu vaccine. Because this is a new virus, there is no effective vaccine at the present time. It would take at least six months to produce a vaccine that could protect us against the new virus. Last season’s flu vaccine will not help at all. If you go to a health care facility, and this virus is, in fact, spread person-to-person, you could be at increased risk of exposure to people who are already ill.”

[NAME OF OFFICIAL] promised that regular media briefings will be held as additional details become available. Information is also available by calling 1-866-4ASKDOH or by visiting www.nyhealth.gov .

###

PROTECTIVE MESSAGE MAP: PANDEMIC FLU*ISSUE: PANDEMIC FLU*

STAKEHOLDER:

GENERAL PUBLIC*QUESTION OR CONCERN:***Now that there's an outbreak, what can people do to protect themselves?**

Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
Avoid close contact between sick and well people	Stay home from work, school or errands when you are sick	Wash your hands with soap often and use a hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available
Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
Limit attendance at public events	You can spread flu to co-workers, resulting in severe staff shortages	Flu can be spread by direct contact
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
Cover mouth and nose with your sleeve or tissue every time you sneeze or cough	If you need food or medicines, ask others who are healthy to bring them to you rather than going to the store yourself	Soap or hand sanitizer can kill the flu virus
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3
Put used tissue in the trash	Friends or helpers can leave supplies outside your door so that you do not expose them to the flu	Hand washing is helpful to reduce the spread of flu

TREATMENT MESSAGE MAP: PANDEMIC FLU*ISSUE: PANDEMIC FLU*

STAKEHOLDER:

GENERAL PUBLIC*QUESTION OR CONCERN:***What is treatment of pandemic flu?**

Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
Since this is a new strain of flu, no vaccine is available right now	Tamiflu may be available, but will probably be reserved for treatment of the sick	Those who are ill should remain at home
Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
A vaccine is being developed	It is in limited supply	Drink plenty of fluids and get plenty of rest
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
It will be distributed as soon as it is made available, but supplies will be limited.	It may or may not be effective	Discard used tissues properly and wash your hands frequently after coughing or sneezing
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3
Watch the media for updates	When effective, it can lessen symptoms if taken within 24 hours of onset of symptoms	Limit exposure to family members and friends

“WORRIED WELL” NEWS RELEASE TEMPLATE**HEALTH OFFICIALS URGE LOCAL RESIDENTS TO HELP IN RESPONSE TO NOVEL INFLUENZA VIRUS: LIMIT CALLS TO 911, DON’T SEEK MEDICAL TREATMENT UNLESS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY**

[LOCATION/DATE]—[NAME OF OFFICIAL] is urging people worried about a new flu virus—[INSERT NAME OF STRAIN]—to avoid calling 9-1-1 unless they have a true emergency, or going to hospitals and doctors’ offices unless they really need treatment. “Do not rush to your doctor or hospital emergency room to get flu vaccine. Because this is a new virus, there is no effective vaccine at the present time. It will take at least six months to produce a vaccine that could protect you against the new virus. Last season’s flu vaccine will not help at all. Also, if this virus turns out to spread person-to-person, and you go to a health care facility, you will be at increased risk of exposure to people who are already ill.”

The New York State Health Department and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are investigating to determine how people who are infected with the new strain of flu contracted the illness, and whether any had a travel history. [IF TRUE, ADD THE FOLLOWING: However, confirmation of the new, or “novel” flu strain, coincides with an unusual occurrence of influenza-like illness in the region so it is prudent to reduce the amount of time you spend in public places.]

[OFFICIAL] said most flu patients can be cared for at home with supportive treatment to reduce their temperature and maintain an adequate fluid intake. However, children should never be given aspirin to reduce pain or fever because it could cause a rare but potentially serious condition called Reye’s Syndrome.

Flu patients who have difficulty breathing or who suffer dehydration do require medical intervention. Parents should be aware that children can become dehydrated in a short amount of time. Things to be concerned about are dry mouth and tongue; lack of tears, dark circles or sunken eyes, decreased urine output and lethargy (extreme drowsiness or pronounced lack of interest). If these circumstances occur, call your health care provider. Call 9-1-1 if your healthcare provider cannot be reached.

For information on caring for a flu patient at home, visit www.nyhealth.gov or call 1-866-4ASKDOH. Take measures, as well, to reduce your risk of getting infected.

- If you are caring for someone with flu, keep the person away from others in the home. Limit the amount of time you spend in close contact with the ill person and wear a respirator during this time.
- Wash your hands frequently using soap and hot water. If you are not near a sink, use a waterless hand rub.
- Keep your hands away from your mouth, nose or eyes.
- Use a disinfectant on surfaces the patient has contacted.
- Make sure you get sufficient rest and exercise, and eat well. This will help to enhance your immune system.

To help protect others, always cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, and discard it appropriately. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the bend of your arm—not your hand. This will prevent germs from being transmitted to surfaces such as desktops, railings and doorknobs.

To date, a total of # suspected flu cases have been reported in [COUNTY]. Similar cases [HAVE/HAVE NOT] been reported in other areas of the state.

###

PUBLIC HEALTH INSTRUCTIONS DURING AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

Throughout an influenza pandemic, people may be asked or required to do things to help reduce the spread of the disease in our community. Here are some examples of what health officials may ask people to do:

STAY HOME

People who have flu-like symptoms should stay home. Children should not go to school if they have symptoms of flu-like illness. Employees should not go to work. Symptoms include:

- Fever over 100 degrees F.

AND

- Cough OR sore throat

Unlike a cold, with symptoms that come on gradually, influenza hits all at once. Fever and severe body aches are common. Staying home if you think you have the flu will be absolutely necessary during a pandemic to limit the spread of the disease.

AVOID LARGE GROUPS

During a pandemic, people—even those who are well—should stay away from public gathering places and large groups. During a pandemic public events may be cancelled because the flu virus will spread rapidly anywhere people are close together.

WEAR A FACEMASK OR A RESPIRATOR

A facemask, for instance a surgical mask, will contain your germs and help prevent others from getting sick if you are infected with pandemic influenza. An N-95 “respirator” provides more protection, but neither should be considered a “stand alone” precaution. Both masks and respirators are most effective as part of a comprehensive series of protective actions.

Consider wearing a facemask if:

- You are sick with the flu and think you might have close contact with other people.
- You live with someone who has the flu (you therefore might be in the early stages of infection) and need to be in a crowded place. Limit the amount of time you spend in these crowded places and wear a facemask while you are there.

- You are well and do not expect to be in close contact with a sick person but need to be in a crowded place. Limit the amount of time you spend in these crowded places and wear a facemask while you are there.

Consider wearing a respirator if:

- You are well and you expect to be in close contact with people who are known or thought to be sick with pandemic flu. Limit the amount of time you are in close contact with these people and wear a respirator during this time. These recommendations apply if you must take care of a sick person at home.

COMPLY WITH ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE

Isolation and Quarantine are public health actions used to contain the spread of a contagious disease.

ISOLATION is for people who are already ill. When someone is isolated, they are separated from people who are healthy. Having the sick person isolated (separated from others) can help to slow or stop the spread of disease. Isolation is usually voluntary, but local, state and federal government has the power to require the isolation of sick people to protect the public.

QUARANTINE is for people who have been exposed to the disease but are not sick. Even though the person is not sick at the moment, they were exposed to the disease and may still become infectious and then spread the disease to others. Quarantine can help to slow or stop this from happening. When someone is placed in quarantine, they are separated from others until it can be determined whether they were infected (for instance, they develop symptoms—in which case they will be isolated—or the incubation period passes and the individual does not become ill).

Local Health Departments generally have the power to enforce quarantines within their jurisdictions. Quarantines will be most effective during the very early stages of a pandemic before the virus begins to circulate broadly.

QUARANTINE MESSAGE MAP: PANDEMIC FLU

ISSUE: PANDEMIC FLU

STAKEHOLDER:

GENERAL PUBLIC

QUESTION OR CONCERN:

What do I need to know about isolation and quarantine?

Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
Pandemic influenza is spread through close contact with an infected person.	Health officials are going to be quarantining those who have had close contact with infected persons and isolating people with symptoms.	We need your help in controlling the spread of pandemic influenza.
Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
To date # persons have been hospitalized with pandemic influenza in our state/region/county	Isolation means keeping people with <i>symptoms</i> apart from others—quarantine means separating people who don't have symptoms but who have been exposed to pandemic influenza from unexposed persons	We will provide the public with regular updates
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
If someone in your family is sick with flu, please stay home until you are sure you are not infected.	Isolation and quarantine is a good way of preventing the spread of disease	Please stay informed on new developments
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3
Health officials are identifying and contacting people who may have been exposed.	We know that being in isolation or quarantine is difficult, and the CDC, state and local health departments feel is an essential step to protect people from a serious disease threat	Follow instructions from local officials

“Why quarantine is necessary” news release template

**OFFICIALS URGE VOLUNTARY QUARANTINE TO REDUCE EFFECTS OF
PANDEMIC INFLUENZA**

CITY, DATE-- The State’s first case of pandemic influenza was confirmed today in [LOCATION]. The [NAME OF AGENCY] is leading the efforts to contain the virus, in conjunction with State and federal officials.

“The health of our community is our main concern as we face the challenges of pandemic influenza,” said [NAME OF OFFICIAL]. “Limiting social contacts through isolation and quarantine will allow us all to help reduce the spread of illness. At this time we are asking that the entire community work together to fight this dangerous virus.”

Quarantine applies to healthy people who are not yet sick, but could become so because of exposure to someone with pandemic flu. *Isolation* applies to people who are already sick and need care.

Health officials are [ASKING/ORDERING] people to quarantine themselves in their homes if they have been exposed to the pandemic virus. Exposed people should stay home for [seven or X] days to monitor for symptoms of influenza to make sure that they have not been infected. People who have symptoms of pandemic flu will be isolated in their homes or a health care setting, depending on the severity of their illness.

[NAME] said the public should be aware of three things about the benefits of quarantine.

First, quarantines work to contain disease. This has been seen over the last 30 years to contain the spread of tuberculosis, and during the 2003 Toronto SARS outbreak.

Second, following quarantine requirements protects you and your family. Staying at home is the best way to protect the health of you and your family, as well as the community. If you are not infected, it also helps you avoid further exposure.

Third, quarantine limits the impact on our economy and our health care system. Business, hospitals and doctor’s offices can continue to operate if sick employees do not go to work. Quarantines limit the number of sick people, allowing the limited supply of antiviral medicines to be available to as many people as possible.

“Please remember that quarantines work to limit the number of those who become sick, which helps you, your family and the economy. We appreciate your cooperation which is essential to reduce transmission of the virus.”

For more information, contact [AGENCY NAME] or visit the website at [WEBSITE ADDRESS].

###

QUARANTINE MESSAGE MAP: PANDEMIC FLU

ISSUE: PANDEMIC FLU

STAKEHOLDER:

GENERAL PUBLIC

QUESTION OR CONCERN:

How can I be sure that isolation and quarantine will be fair?

Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
Isolation and quarantine is a proven method to help stop the spread of disease early in a pandemic	Isolation and quarantine rules are meant to be fair to everyone	We will try to meet the basic needs of individuals in isolation and quarantine
Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
When there is no medicine or vaccine, isolation and quarantine historically has worked to help stop the spread of the disease	These rules apply to anyone who has been exposed to the virus	Basic needs such as food, medicine, etc. (event specific), will be provided
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
In Canada during the SARS epidemic, isolation and quarantine was very effective	The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the New York State Department of Health support isolation and quarantine rules	We have worked out a system with the following organizations (event specific) to meet individuals' needs
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3
It also worked in Asia to fight against the spread of Avian Influenza	We need your cooperation—we're all in this together	Contact (event specific) to find out more information

“We will be fair” news release template

OFFICIALS: ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE PLAN FAIR AND EQUITABLE FOR ALL

City/Date – The [AGENCY NAME] is reassuring citizens that the isolation and quarantine plan that has been put in place to stop the spread of pandemic influenza will be implemented in a consistent and fair manner. The rules surrounding isolation and quarantine apply equally to anyone who has symptoms of pandemic flu or who has been exposed to the virus.

Quarantine applies to healthy people who are not yet sick, but could become so because of exposure to someone with pandemic flu. *Isolation* applies to people who are already sick and need care.

“The [AGENCY NAME] has developed its isolation and quarantine plan to be as fair and equitable as possible for all of our residents,” stated [NAME OF OFFICIAL]. “We know this is not easy for anyone, and we appreciate the willingness of our community members to pull together in this difficult situation.”

Historically, isolation and quarantine has worked well in stopping the spread of disease, especially when no medicine or vaccine is available. During the SARS outbreak in Canada, voluntary isolation played a key role in containing the disease. The New York State Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control support the use of quarantine to slow the spread of the pandemic virus when it first enters a specific area. As case numbers increase, it will become less effective. Because the virus is spread easily from person to person, isolation of sick people will continue to be crucial throughout the course of the pandemic.

[NAME] said local officials are committed to meeting the basic needs of all individuals who are in isolation or quarantine. Arrangements have been made with community organizations to provide basic necessities for affected individuals.

For more information, please contact [NAME] at [TELEPHONE] or visit following website at [WEBSITE ADDRESS]

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QUARANTINE MESSAGE MAP: PANDEMIC FLU

ISSUE: PANDEMIC FLU

STAKEHOLDER:

GENERAL PUBLIC

QUESTION OR CONCERN:

What about my lost wages/time?

Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
At this time there is no nationwide plan to address the issue of missed work and pay	We understand that this is an important concern for many people	Your health and your family's health is the most important consideration
Supporting Fact 1-1	Supporting Fact 2-1	Supporting Fact 3-1
Different employers have different policies	People from many different jobs may have to miss work	Isolation and quarantine will reduce people's exposure to the virus
Supporting Fact 1-2	Supporting Fact 2-2	Supporting Fact 3-2
The government is very aware of the problems this may cause	We are listening to all concerns	The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have said that this is the best option that we have right now
Supporting Fact 1-3	Supporting Fact 2-3	Supporting Fact 3-3
Officials are looking at ways to reduce the economic impact	We need to balance the economic impact with the need to slow this pandemic and save lives	By cooperating you could save a life, maybe even someone you love

“Economic impact” news release template

**EMPLOYERS URGED TO SUPPORT ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE EFFORTS,
EXTEND SICK BANK FOR CONFINED EMPLOYEES**

CITY, DATE -- Federal, state and local officials are looking for ways to reduce the economic impact on New Yorkers in isolation and quarantine, to help reduce transmission of pandemic influenza. Although the measures are preventing some people from going to work, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), they are essential to bring this killer disease under control.

“In every case, isolation and quarantine will be kept as short as possible,” stated [NAME OF OFFICIAL]. It is important for both employees and employers to understand the critical importance of isolation and quarantine—reducing exposure—which can result in saving lives. Persons with influenza symptoms are isolated so they will not spread germs to uninfected individuals while they undergo treatment. Persons who have been exposed to the influenza virus but don’t have symptoms are quarantined—kept separate from healthy people—until it is certain they aren’t going to become ill.

With almost no vaccine and little antiviral medications available right now, isolation and quarantine are the best weapons against the disease which is fatal in approximately [NUMBER] percent of cases.

Whenever possible, employers should permit employees who are in home isolation or quarantine to telecommute, so they may continue to work and get paid. Employees should be strongly discouraged from coming to work if they are experiencing any flu-like symptoms. No one should be threatened with loss of their job for staying home if they truly are sick. Expansion of sick bank options should be considered for workers who have no paid leave, or have used up all their sick time.

Officials also are encouraging banks and other creditors to develop flexible options for people who suffer extreme economic consequences as a result of isolation or quarantine.

“We understand that being isolated or quarantined can have an impact on people’s ability to earn a living and pay their bills,” [OFFICIAL] said. “But who can put a price on saving lives?”

For more information, please contact [NAME AND TELEPHONE #] at [AGENCY NAME] the following website: [WEBSITE ADDRESS].

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For immediate release: [DATE] Contact: [PIO name and number]

HEALTH OFFICIALS ADVISE CLOSURE OF SCHOOLS IN [NAME] COUNTY

State and local health officials have advised the closure of schools to slow, or reduce the spread of disease now that the influenza pandemic has reached our [STATE/COUNTY]. At this time it is not known how long schools will be closed, but it may be for as long as 12 weeks.

Because the influenza virus is easily passed from one person to another through such actions as coughing, sneezing and even talking, colleges, day care centers and preschools have also been advised to close. Health officials caution that it is unsafe for large groups of people to gather in any crowded location and they warn people to stay away from shopping malls, community centers and other places where they may be exposed to the dangerous virus.

“We know this is an anxious time, and we are asking for everyone’s cooperation to help protect our community. We are working closely with health officials to deal with the situation and will keep parents updated with any important information,” said [NAME OF LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIAL].

According to [LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIAL], the purpose of closing schools is to limit contact among children to decrease their risk of getting sick and to limit the spread of infection. For that reason, parents who must make child care arrangements should keep the care group sizes to a minimum (for example, less than six children in a group) and should make sure that children do not move from group to group and do not have extended social contacts outside the group. No one who has flu symptoms should go out in public, unless it is to seek medical care. In that case, they should stay at least three feet away from other people, and if possible, wear a mask.

Symptoms of influenza-like illness include: fever (over 100 degrees F.) AND cough OR sore throat; runny nose; muscle pain and fatigue. If you believe you have influenza and are unable to contact your health care provider right away, be sure to do the following:

- Unless you know of a medical reason not to—such as a medication allergy—use over-the-counter pain relievers to control fever, sore throat and muscle aches. Do not use aspirin in children or teenagers; it can cause Reye syndrome, a life-threatening illness.
- Drink plenty of liquids to avoid dehydration.
- Call 9-1-1 immediately if the following symptoms are present: chest pain unrelated to coughing; difficulty breathing; irregular heartbeat; fainting; confusion/disorientation; seizures; numbness or tingling on one side of the body.
- Be sure everyone in your home washes their hands frequently.
- Keep anyone who is sick with the flu away from the people who are not sick.

More information on pandemic influenza is available at www.nyhealth.gov or www.pandemicflu.gov or [LOCAL WEBSITE INFORMATION].

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For immediate release: [DATE] Contact: [PIO name and number]

**HEALTH OFFICIALS ADVISE SCHOOLS MAY REOPEN IN
[NAME] COUNTY**

State and local health officials have advised that the influenza pandemic is under control and students may return to class if they have no flu-like symptoms.

“Because the flu spreads easily from person-to-person, please keep children who have flu-like symptoms at home,” [SCHOOL OFFICIAL] said. “Symptoms include: fever of more than 100 degrees F. and cough or sore throat. Don’t send sick children to school—they will be excluded from class and sent home.”

Although school is re-opening, there are some people in the community who are still sick, so it is important to continue to practice healthy habits. Wash hands frequently with soap and water. If you are someplace that does not have a sink, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Always read and follow label instructions. Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth. Keep your distance from people who are coughing or sneezing. Try to stay at least three feet away—the length of a yardstick or a little more than arm’s length for most adults.

Health officials say that influenza pandemics sometimes happen in waves. This means more people could become sick in the weeks or months ahead. If more people do get sick, schools may need to close again.

More information on pandemic influenza is available at www.nyhealth.gov or www.pandemicflu.gov or [LOCAL WEBSITE INFORMATION].

Pandemic Psycho-Social Messages

Statements on Grief

- There is great grief and sadness in our nation (state/community). But we will recover and we will help others to recover. We will carry our grief and sadness with us, drawing on the strength of our people.
- Our hearts go out to those who are suffering from loss, separation, or uncertainty. We are working with state and local organizations throughout the region to help people cope and manage the situation as well as assist them in their grief and loss.
- We have all been touched by this tragedy, and we have witnessed heroic efforts that have saved countless lives. But, sadly, it will take time to get a clear picture of the breadth and depth of this disaster.
- Only in time will we know and be able to live with the true toll of this disaster. Whatever the toll of this disaster, it will devastate all of us.
- For those experiencing the grief and loss of losing loved ones, our goal under these circumstances is to maintain the dignity of the deceased, honor family wishes, and respect religious and social customs.
- We are supporting local medical examiners and coroners.
 - We are providing teams to assist with autopsies, funerals, and administration.
 - We are providing equipment to assist with the recovery, identification, and burial or cremation of the deceased.
- All of us share in this loss, but we will recover together as a nation (state/community).

Statements on Mental Health Issues

- While this will be a long and difficult period for those who have suffered so greatly, it is important to remember that, as a nation, we have a tremendous capacity to recover and have overcome past crises we have faced.
- As pressing public health issues are identified, addressed and overcome, it will be important to deal with the emotional and psychological wounds of this crisis.
- It's very important to acknowledge that people often experience strong and unpleasant emotional and physical responses to disasters. Reactions may include combinations of

confusion, fear, hopelessness, helplessness, sleeplessness, physical pain, feeling anxious, angry, grief, shock, mistrust of others, guilt, and loss of confidence in self or others.

- These responses are not abnormal, but a predictable aftermath of disasters. For most, these symptoms will decrease over time. The psychological outcome of our community as a whole will be recovery not illness.
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD is an often debilitating mental health disorder that can develop in a small percent of people after exposure to a terrifying event or ordeal in which grave physical harm occurred or was threatened. They repeatedly re-experience the ordeal in the form of flashback episodes, memories, nightmares, or frightening thoughts, especially when they are exposed to events that remind them of the ordeal.
- The good news is that effective treatments are available for PTSD, including the use of certain medications, frequently combined with cognitive and behavioral psychosocial treatments — talking therapies that give people skills to manage upsetting and unwanted thoughts as well as the physical symptoms they may feel.
- We are establishing emergency teams of physicians and medical personnel to provide immediate mental health services and assist the local communities in handling their mental health needs.
- Most relevant right now and in the coming weeks for the people who will bring relief is that they create and sustain an environment of safety, calming, connectedness to others, self efficacy/help, and hopefulness.
- The federal Department of Health and Human Services has established a toll-free hotline for people in crisis in the aftermath of this disaster. By calling **1-800-273-TALK** (1-800-273-8255), callers will be connected to a network of local crisis counseling centers across the country. Callers to the hotline will receive counseling from trained staff who will listen to and assist callers in getting the mental health help they need. The hotline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.