

SWINE FLU PREPAREDNESS GUIDANCE FOR MEDICAL RESERVE CORPS UNITS

Preparing for influenza outbreaks, such as the current swine influenza outbreak, is critical for Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) units. This guidance identifies important, specific activities MRC units can do now to prepare for such an event. Many activities are specific to influenza outbreaks, but a number also pertain to any type of public health emergency. This guidance is adapted from the *Pandemic Influenza Planning Guidance for MRC Units* (http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov/File/MRC_Pandemic_Influenza_Planning_Guidance.pdf), which was derived from the *State and Local Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist* developed by HHS and found on the federal government's pandemic influenza website (<http://www.pandemicflu.gov>). It also includes relevant elements from the *Business Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist* and *Faith-Based & Community Organizations Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Checklist*, also from HHS. In addition, the information on swine flu is directly from the CDC's *Key Facts about Swine Influenza (Swine Flu)*, available at http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/key_facts.htm.

This guidance is *not* intended to set forth mandatory requirements for MRC units. Rather, each MRC unit should determine for itself whether it is adequately prepared for disease outbreaks in accordance with the laws, plans and procedures of its local jurisdiction and state. In addition, many of the actions listed below may not be applicable to all MRC units. Planning and response actions for influenza outbreaks will be MRC unit- and community-specific. MRC units should engage in planning and response actions for influenza outbreaks which are within the purview, scope, training and capabilities of the unit and the community which it serves.

What is Swine Flu?

For detailed information on swine flu, see the CDC's swine flu website at <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>.

Swine influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza virus that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza in pigs. Swine flu viruses cause high levels of illness and low death rates in pigs. Swine influenza viruses may circulate among swine throughout the year, but most outbreaks occur during the late fall and winter months similar to outbreaks in humans.

Swine flu viruses do not normally infect humans. However, sporadic human infections with swine flu have occurred. Most commonly, these cases occur in persons with direct exposure to pigs (e.g., children near pigs at a fair or workers in the swine industry). In addition, there have been documented cases of one person spreading swine flu to others. In the past, CDC received reports of approximately one human swine influenza virus infection every one to two years in the U.S., but from December 2005 through February 2009, 12 cases of human infection with swine influenza have been reported.

The symptoms of swine flu in people are expected to be similar to the symptoms of regular human [seasonal influenza](#) and include fever, lethargy, lack of appetite and coughing. Some people with swine flu also have reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Influenza Outbreak and Pandemic Planning Considerations for MRC Units

MRC Involvement in Community Preparedness

- Ensure the MRC unit is represented in the community's public health, medical and emergency services infrastructure, especially task forces, committees or other groups established to address influenza planning and preparedness, that represent all relevant stakeholders in the jurisdiction, including local, state and federal government; public health; healthcare; emergency response (law enforcement, fire service, emergency medical services and emergency management); agriculture; education; business and industry; media and telecommunications; community-based organizations; churches and faith-based organizations; and private citizens.
- Ensure the community's emergency operations plan (EOP), influenza response plan or similar plan clearly delineates accountability and responsibility, as well as accurately reflects the capabilities, and resources of the local MRC unit.
- Ensure that the MRC-related elements of the jurisdiction's influenza response plan and/or EOP are compliant with the National Incident Management System (NIMS).
- Formalize agreements with neighboring jurisdictions and address communications, mutual aid and other cross-jurisdictional needs involving MRC units.
- If applicable (i.e., within the scope and capabilities of the local MRC unit), ensure the influenza response plan and/or EOP addresses the assistance the MRC unit can provide to special needs populations or those vulnerable due to mobility, visual, hearing, speech, or cognitive impairments; chronic medical conditions requiring regular medical treatment (usually provided in the home); or those who are elderly, unaccompanied children, people from diverse cultures, non-English speaking or have limited English proficiency, technology dependent and living at home, without transportation, or pregnant women and infants.
- If applicable, address any mental health support that the MRC unit can provide for the community, including patients and their families, and those affected by community containment procedures in the influenza response plan and/or EOP.
- If applicable, ensure the MRC unit is included in the emergency public information (EPI) or risk communications plan that addresses the needs of targeted public, private sector, governmental, public health, medical and emergency response audiences; identifies priority channels of communication; delineates the network of public information personnel, including lead spokespersons and persons trained in emergency risk communications; and links to other communication networks.
- Ensure the influenza response plan and/or EOP identifies the legal authorities established to utilize MRC volunteers and protect them from liability in the performance of their volunteer duties.

- Ensure MRC volunteers are educated on what legal protections exist when they are involved in a response to an influenza outbreak or pandemic.
- Ensure the influenza response plan and/or EOP clearly describes the process necessary to request, activate and utilize the local MRC unit(s), as well as resources from outside of the area which may assist the community in times of emergency.
- Ensure MRC volunteers are trained in, and utilize, the Incident Command System (ICS) and comply with NIMS in the performance of their responsibilities, in accordance with the influenza response plan and/or EOP.
- Ensure the MRC unit is represented on community-based task forces that support healthcare institutions on a local or regional basis.
- Identify the authorities responsible for officially activating the MRC unit under the influenza response plan and/or EOP.

MRC Support to Public Health and Medical Infrastructure

- If applicable, develop and test procedures for the MRC unit to support surge capacity of public health agencies, hospitals, clinical laboratories and other healthcare institutions to meet the needs of the jurisdiction during an influenza outbreak or pandemic.
- Determine how the MRC unit can assist each component of the healthcare delivery network (e.g., hospitals, long-term care, home care and emergency care), as well as the special needs of vulnerable and hard-to-reach patients. Ensure this assistance is described in the influenza response plan and/or EOP.
- If applicable, ensure the influenza response plan and/or EOP adequately describes MRC support for mortuary services during an influenza outbreak or pandemic.
- Maintain a current roster of all active and former MRC members who may be available to support emergency operations. Ensure procedures are established to contact, recall and deploy MRC volunteers in an emergency.
- Ensure the MRC unit is involved in planning for the utilization of spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers (SUVs) in an emergency. Ensure that any Volunteer Reception Center established by the community (to facilitate the proper placement and utilization of SUVs) includes representation from the local MRC unit.
- Ensure credentialing of MRC volunteers is included in the community's (and/or state's) procedures for verifying credentials of volunteer healthcare personnel. Ensure MRC volunteers have provided information on licenses, certifications, training and other pertinent information to authorities and/or agencies responsible for credentialing or verification of credentials of volunteer healthcare personnel.

- As appropriate, ensure MRC volunteers are properly trained and equipped to support healthcare facilities and the jurisdiction with isolating and cohorting patients with known or suspected influenza.
- As appropriate, ensure MRC volunteers are properly trained and equipped to support healthcare facilities if a quarantine of potentially exposed healthcare personnel is necessary.

MRC Support for Infection Control and Clinical Operations

- If appropriate, ensure the MRC unit has access to Health Alert Network information.
- Ensure MRC volunteers are educated about influenza, especially swine flu, and infection control and clinical guidelines, as well as personal preparedness methods.
- Ensure the MRC unit is included in the jurisdiction's EPI or risk communications plan to regularly update providers as an influenza outbreak or pandemic unfolds.
- As appropriate, ensure MRC volunteers, especially clinicians, have access to EPI-X and are trained in its use.

MRC Support for Vaccine Distribution and Use

- Ensure the MRC unit is included in state and local plans for vaccine distribution, use and monitoring; and for communication of vaccine status.
- Ensure the MRC unit is included in exercises of state and local plans that address the procurement, storage, security, distribution and monitoring actions necessary (including vaccine safety) to ensure access to vaccines and medicines during a serious influenza outbreak or pandemic.
- Ensure the MRC unit is included in, and can support (as appropriate), plans and procedures for tracking the number and priority of vaccine recipients; where and by whom vaccinations will be given; a distribution plan for ensuring that vaccine and necessary equipment and supplies are available at all points of distribution in the community; the security and logistical support for the points of distribution; and the training requirements for involved personnel.
- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit can support the community's plans and procedures related to vaccine security issues, cold chain requirements, transport and storage issues and bio-hazardous waste issues.
- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit can support the community's plans and procedures addressing the needs of vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations in an influenza outbreak or pandemic event.
- Document with written agreements the commitments and participation of MRC volunteers in any influenza response and/or vaccination plans.

- Ensure MRC volunteers are considered for priority, along with first responders, healthcare providers and other emergency services personnel, in the community's influenza response and/or vaccination plans.
- Inform MRC volunteers in advance about where they will be vaccinated.

MRC Support for Antiviral Drug Distribution and Use

- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit is included in state and local plans for the distribution and use of antiviral drugs during a pandemic via the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) to healthcare facilities that will administer them to priority groups.
- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit can support plans that address the procurement, storage, security, distribution and monitoring actions necessary to assure access to treatments during an influenza outbreak or pandemic.

MRC Involvement in Influenza Emergency Response Exercises

- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit is included in exercises of the jurisdiction's plan to investigate and contain potential cases or local outbreaks of influenza potentially caused by a novel or pandemic strain.
- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit is included in exercises of the jurisdiction's containment plan that delineates procedures for isolation and quarantine; the procedures and legal authorities for implementing and enforcing these containment measures (such as school closures, canceling public transportation and other movement restrictions within, to, and from the jurisdiction); and the methods that will be used to support, service and monitor those affected by these containment measures in healthcare facilities, other residential facilities, homes, community facilities and other settings.
- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit is included in exercises of the jurisdiction's plan to implement various levels of movement restrictions within, to, and from the jurisdiction.
- Determine the MRC unit's role in informing citizens in advance about what containment procedures may be used in the community (as part of the MRC unit's involvement in the jurisdiction's EPI or risk communication plan, as appropriate).

MRC Involvement in Public Information and Risk Communication

- Assess readiness to support the jurisdiction's EPI or risk communication needs in preparation for an influenza outbreak or pandemic, including regular review, exercise and update of EPI or risk communication plans.
- Plan and coordinate support for EPI or risk communication activities with government agencies, private industry, education and non-profit partners (e.g., local American Red Cross chapters).
- Identify and train lead subject-specific spokespersons, if appropriate.

- Provide MRC volunteers with training on risk communication for use during an influenza outbreak or pandemic.
- Develop and maintain up-to-date contacts of key stakeholders and public information personnel, and participate in exercises of the plan to provide regular updates to the community as an influenza outbreak or pandemic unfolds.
- As appropriate, support community resources, such as hotlines and websites, to respond to local questions from the public and professional groups.

Planning for the Impact of Influenza on the MRC Unit

- Expect and allow for absences and/or unavailability of MRC volunteers during an influenza outbreak or pandemic due to factors such as personal illness, family member illness, community containment measures and quarantines, school and/or business closures and public transportation closures.
- Encourage and track annual influenza vaccination for MRC members.
- Develop and disseminate programs and materials covering influenza fundamentals (e.g. signs and symptoms of influenza and modes of transmission), personal and family protection and response strategies (e.g. hand hygiene, coughing/sneezing etiquette and contingency plans). Educate volunteers during meetings and training sessions. Stress the following information:
 - ***Avoid close contact with people who are sick.*** When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too. Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.
 - ***Stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick.*** You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
 - ***Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.*** Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. Alternatively, cough or sneeze into your arm. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
 - ***Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze.*** Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
 - ***Practice other good health habits.*** Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food.
- Anticipate MRC volunteers' fear and anxiety, rumors and misinformation, and plan communications accordingly.
- Identify and/or develop platforms (e.g. hotlines, dedicated websites) for communicating pandemic status and actions to MRC volunteers in a consistent and timely way, including redundancies in the emergency contact system.

- Ensure MRC volunteers are aware of community sources for timely and accurate pandemic information (domestic and international) and resources for obtaining counter-measures (e.g., vaccines and antiviral medications).
- As appropriate, ensure the MRC unit is included in continuity of operations plans for essential health department services, including contingency planning for increasing the public health workforce in response to absenteeism among health department staff and stakeholder groups that have key responsibilities under a community's influenza response plan and/or EOP.
- Ensure availability of psychosocial support services (including educational and training materials) for MRC volunteers who participate in or provide support for the response to public health emergencies such as influenza outbreaks or pandemics.
- In conjunction with community efforts, participate in workforce resilience programs and ensure readiness to deploy to maximize volunteers' performance and personal resilience during a public health emergency.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Websites

Swine Flu

- <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/> - CDC's primary swine flu website.
- <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/recommendations> - CDC guidance and recommendations on swine flu.
- www.cdc.gov/swineflu/key_facts.htm - Facts regarding swine flu.
- http://www.hhs.gov/secretary/phe_swh1n1.html - HHS public health emergency declaration for swine flu outbreak.
- <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=2009/04/0131.xml> - USDA swine flu FAQs.
- <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html> - WHO swine flu website.
- <http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&t=p&msa=0&msid=106484775090296685271.0004681a37b713f6b5950&ll=32.639375,-110.390625&spn=15.738151,25.488281&z=5> - *Google Maps* swine flu tracking tool.

Pandemic Influenza

- <http://www.pandemicflu.gov> - The official U.S. government website for information on pandemic and avian influenza.
- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/> - CDC pandemic influenza website.

Avian Influenza

- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/> - CDC avian influenza website.
- http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/ - WHO avian influenza website.
- http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome?navtype=SU&navid=AVIAN_INFLUENZA - USDA avian influenza website.
- http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/avian_influenza/index.jsp - USGS avian influenza website.

Seasonal Influenza

- <http://www.hhs.gov/flu/> - HHS seasonal influenza website.
- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/> - CDC seasonal influenza website.
- <http://www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/flu.html> - FDA seasonal influenza website.

Masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- <http://www.osha.gov/dsg/guidance/stockpiling-facemasks-respirators.html>
- http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/guidance_homecare.htm
- <http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2007/NEW01630.html>
- http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/guidelines_infection_control.htm

Planning Guidance, Checklists and Toolkits

- <http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/pandemic-influenza.html> - National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza.
- <http://www.hhs.gov/pandemicflu/plan/> - HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan.
- <http://www.hhs.gov/pandemicflu/plan/factsheet.html> - HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan fact sheet.
- http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/editorial/editorial_0566.xml - National Response Framework.
- <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/statelocalchecklist.html> - State and Local Influenza Planning Checklist.
- <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/stateplans.html> - Pandemic Planning: A Convening of the States.

- <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab3.html> - Pandemic Influenza Planning: A Guide for Individuals and Families.
- <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab4.html> - Business Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist.
- <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab5.html> - Pandemic Influenza Planning for Schools.
- <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab6.html> - Pandemic Influenza Planning for Healthcare Providers.
- <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/healthprofessional.htm> - CDC Pandemic Influenza Toolkit (for healthcare providers).
- <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab7.html> - Faith-Based & Community Organizations Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Checklist.
- <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tools.html> - Planning Tools (FluAid, FluSurge and Pandemic Influenza Tabletop Exercise).