Tabletop Exercise
Pandemic Influenza

Incorporating Evidence-Based Communications Best Practices

into your Agency's PHEP Protocols

Agenda

- Welcome and Introduction (15 minutes)

- Exercise (2-3 hours)

- Lunch (30 minutes)

- Hot Wash (1 hour)

- Next Steps (15 minutes)

Exercise Objectives

- Identify your agency's current strengths and gaps in emergency communication and coordination

- Review and list the roles, plans, and procedures related to emergency communication

- Identify issues related to building effective communication channels between public health, health care, and the public, including vulnerable populations

- Incorporate objectively assessed and research-validated evidence and best practices into your agency's PHEP communications protocols.

Introductions

- Name

- Organization

- Area of responsibility/role

Today's exercise

- Hypothetical scenario depicting a large-scale public health emergency

- Facilitator will lead the participants (players) in a discussion around a series of messages in the scenario

- You will examine current plans, procedures, and policies and consider best practices for disseminating emergency communications

- We will conclude with a "hot wash" (debriefing) to identify strengths and gaps and effective response

Roles

- Facilitator

- Players

- Table discussion leaders

- Note takers

- Observers

- Evaluators

Instructions

- Assume scenario is real.

- Play the role of your department, agency, or community.

- Consider policy issues as well as specific procedures.

- Focus on identifying system gaps and strengths rather than on individual knowledge.

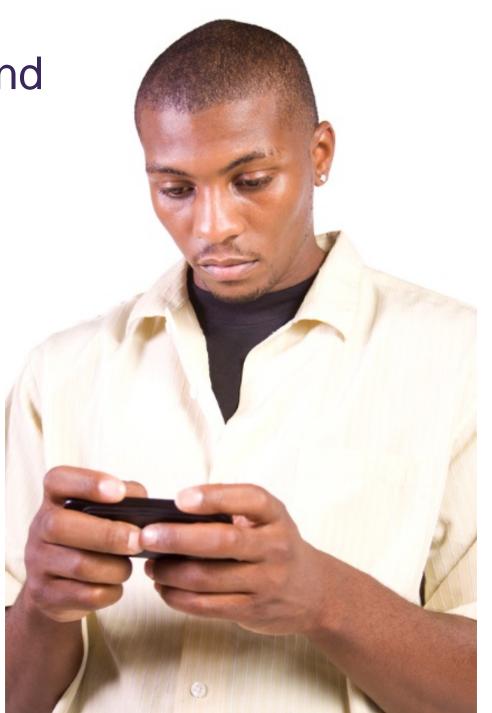- Take notes for the debriefing discussion.

Questions?

Exercise

Setting the Stage

- Jefferson County, Newtopia

- Largest county in state

- Total population exceeds two million

- Arborville is largest city in Jefferson County

Additional Background

- Last influenza pandemic was 2009 H1N1 pandemic

- Diverse population

- 79 percent of general adult population uses Short Message Service (SMS)

The Disease Emerges

January 5

- An outbreak of severe respiratory illness emerges in rural China

- More than 40 cases

- 20 people hospitalized

- 3 deaths

Disease Details

- New cases identified

- Person-to-person transmission is suspected

- Viral cultures test positive for type A influenza

- Strain is a new type of flu (H6N1)

Episode 1: Growing Awareness

February to March

- WHO officials issue alerts and CDC disseminates information through the Health Alert Network (HAN)

- News media around the world prominently feature this story

Outbreak Spreads

- 500 cases of H6N1 detected throughout East Asia

- Fatality rates approach 5 percent

- Officially branded as "pandemic" by WHO

- Vaccine not ready

- Antiviral drugs in limited supply

- Currently no cases in the U.S.

United States Response

- Local health departments, the Newtopia State Department of Health, and CDC are on heightened alert for signs of local outbreak

- Social distancing measures are discussed at businesses and organizations

- Local health agencies ask employers and schools to report increases in absenteeism

Messaging Questions for Episode 1

Question 1:

Public health, safety, and health care employees need information about the new outbreak.

What communication channel(s) will you use to share information with each group?

Messaging Questions for Episode 1

Question 2:

Public health, safety, and health care employees need information about the new outbreak.

What specific information about this outbreak will you include in communications to each group?

Messaging Questions for Episode 1

Question 3:

Draft an SMS text message to communicate necessary information to health care providers.

Messaging Questions for Episode 1

Question 4:

What processes are in place to coordinate communications among multiple agencies? What will you do to work together to avoid information overload and improve quality of alerts?

Episode 2: Flu Arrives in the United States

April

- April 16: First case of H6N1 is detected in Jefferson County, Newtopia

- The patient arrived on a flight from China

- April 18: 4 more cases are detected, 3 from the same flight

- A vaccine for this strain of influenza is still not ready

Increasing Impact

- Increased symptoms in Jefferson County

- Heightened public fear about the high mortality rate associated with this strain of flu

- Concerns about people seeking unnecessary care

- Vital need for outreach to the general public, vulnerable populations, and limited English proficient (LEP) populations

Messaging Questions for Episode 2

Public health workers, health care workers, limited English proficient populations, and the general public need to be contacted about these primary cases.

1. What channel(s) will you use to communicate with each of these groups?

2. What specific information will you include in communications to each of these groups?

Episode 3: The Pandemic Spreads

May

49 new cases of H6N1:

- 31 cases reside in Arborville

- 18 cases live outside Arborville, but work or have visited there

- 2 dead

Additional Cases

End of May

- 578 cases:

  – 200 cases reside outside the city

  – 23 cases are health care providers and public health workers

  – 30 dead

- Cases have been concentrated in schools

A Vaccine is Ready

June

- FDA releases a vaccine

- Jefferson County receives 100,000 vaccinations

- Vaccines are to be given to high-priority groups first

Messaging Questions for Episode 3

Question 1:

Vaccine distribution is beginning. What channel(s) will you use to communicate with health care workers about high-priority groups and how to access the stockpile of vaccines?

Messaging Questions for Episode 3

Question 2:

Public interest in a vaccine has caused a rush of calls and visits to local doctor offices.

What information will you share with the general public to quell concerns and fears? What channel(s) will you use to distribute this information?

Messaging Questions for Episode 3

Question 3:

How will you reach vulnerable and limited English proficient populations? What partnerships or other community relationships could help you share information with these populations?

Messaging Questions for Episode 3

Question 4:

What legal issues must you consider when communicating vaccine information to the public? What processes are in place to offer legal support for emergency communications?

Episode 4: Vaccine Distribution

August

Shortages in practitioners and resources

- Local hospitals and outpatient clinics are extremely short-staffed

- Shortage of beds and equipment in intensive care units

Additional Vaccine

- A second batch of vaccinations becomes available

- New vaccination sites are required

Messaging Questions for Episode 4

Question 1:

You need to mobilize the medical and public health reserve corps to provide vaccinations. How will you mobilize reserve corps members?

Messaging Questions for Episode 4

Question 2:

How will you provide public health workers and health care providers informed with time-sensitive, up-to-date information about additional vaccine supplies and distribution sites?

Messaging Questions for Episode 4

Question 3

How will you inform the public about wait times due to shortage of staff? When new vaccination sites are operational, how will you communicate that information to the public?

Episode 5: Recovery and Planning

September

- Pandemic appears to be controlled

- Decrease in the prevalence of H6N1 in Jefferson County

- Need to prepare for additional cases and surges in H6N1 prevalence

Messaging Questions for Episode 5

Question 1:

Little time remains between now and when the regular influenza season starts. What messages should you communicate to the public at this time?

Messaging Questions for Episode 5

Question 2:

How will you solicit feedback from health care providers, public health workers, and employers involved in the response in order to evaluate your communicate efforts?

Lunch

Hot Wash

Hot Wash Instructions

- Return to your assigned place at the table.

- Table discussion:

  1. Identify the 1-3 most important activities accomplished during this tabletop exercise.

  2. What are the 1-3 most important gaps identified during this exercise?

- Report out

- Table discussion

  1. What strategies/actions will you take to resolve the gaps or issues you found during this exercise?

  2. What are the most important lessons learned from participating in this exercise?

- Report out and full-group discussion

Next Steps

- AAR (After Action Report)

- Exercise evaluation

- Final comments

- Adjourn

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