

Kansas Pandemic Influenza Tabletop Exercise for Schools

(Adapted from the Tulsa County Oklahoma 2006 School Tabletop Exercise)

Set up:

Use a meeting room that will hold up to 20 people. Set aside a half day to a day for the exercise. Bring in individuals you either have designated for leadership positions if your plans are in place or ones you believe would be important in the event of a pandemic event. Ask your local health department and emergency management personnel to participate or attend to provide technical assistance. Consider involving, as an observer, union representation where applicable. Consider allowing others including local hospital administration, Red Cross and the media to audit the process and provide information or answer questions as needed.

Irrespective of your present level of planning, the exercise will lead to a list of priorities for addressing an event of this type. Many of the issues that will arise will be helpful for other "all hazards" preparedness planning. You will also be introduced to other "key partners" in the community who will also be affected by the event.

You can either present the entire scenario to participants or break out the particular modules and present them separately, in order, to participants as the scenario progresses. Adapt the scope and particulars as needed in relation to local circumstances. Set time limits for each module discussion.

Purpose:

- To raise awareness of issues associated with a Pandemic Influenza Outbreak
- To evaluate gaps in school plans
- To begin the process of internalizing the scope and magnitude of a relatively 'worst case' pandemic influenza event on the level of the "1918 Spanish Influenza"

Objectives:

- Illustrate the present level of Pandemic Preparedness Planning for your school and school system.
- Explain how priorities are established by an emergency planning committee during a Pandemic.
- Describe the challenges associated with a Pandemic.

Narrative (baseline setting):

- WHO (World Health Organization) has raised the Pandemic Alert level based upon evidence of sustained and increasing levels of human-to-human transmission.
- CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) has issued travel restrictions and is encouraging public health entities to implement enhanced surveillance for patients who traveled to these areas within the past ten days and may have flu symptoms.

Module 1 – Setting:

- Three weeks pass. Several patients have been laboratory confirmed to have the influenza virus that has been associated with the human-to-human transmission. These cases are initially identified on the East and West coasts of the United States.

- CDC has issued Health Alerts to State and Local Public Health Departments urging them to take necessary public health measures to contain outbreaks.
- Local and National media are running stories on flu cases and has increased concerns among the public.

Discussion

1. What are the issues for schools in your jurisdiction at this point in the scenario?
2. What measures does your plan call for? Do you have a plan?
3. Are your command and control systems in place (National Incident Management System based or other) to begin coordinating efforts?
4. What communications have you had with your local public health authorities?
5. How would you monitor and support your employees during this period of a pandemic?
6. Is your external communications plan functioning? What kinds of story's will the media be running? How will you respond to their requests for information?
7. What special or unique issues exist within schools that need to be anticipated and dealt with? (e.g. legal, contractual, teachers, students, nursing, maintenance, food service)
8. Of the issues that arise, which ones would apply to other crisis management situations?
9. How did you respond upon initially hearing of cases in other parts of the world?
10. Identify which elements of crisis response infrastructure you have in place and which ones you do not. What are your strengths and weakness. Use this as your baseline for the rest of the scenario.

Module 2 – Setting

- Three more weeks pass. Your State Health Department confirms five cases of the virus have been reported with the state.
- Local Universities and other Public Schools are experiencing increased absentee rates. It is not known to what degree this is a self-quarantine situation or a result of actual disease.
- The school nurse reports indications of symptoms in the student population.
- Teachers and other staff begin calling in reporting symptoms for themselves and/or their own children or family members and cannot report to work.
- Hospitals are reporting shortages in Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and staff. Once again, it is unknown how much of this is due to disease, fear or other phenomena?

Discussion

1. What information do decision makers need to know at this point?
2. How or can you obtain the information?
3. What measures would the school implement at this time?
4. How will you maintain continuity of operations during this phase? Do you have a continuity of operations plan (COOP) in place?
4. What systems do you wish you had put in place prior to this situation?

Module 3 – Setting

- After four weeks to six weeks of widespread illness and an exponentially increasing number of cases, the public is fearful of going out into the community and public health has begun implementing “voluntary” community containment measures.
- Local hospitals have no beds available except for the extremely ill. Schools are being asked to assist by making their facilities available as alternate care sites.
- Emergency response providers are affected to the point where basic societal protective measures are becoming problematic (e.g. fire and police).
- Supply systems for your school including food and maintenance are no longer functioning.
- You have received word that some of your staff and students have died of complications.
- People within your family are sick and others are showing symptoms. Of the 10 people initially in your decision making system, some are absent. You have not heard from and cannot contact two of them. (If actually utilizing a NIMS based approach to the scenario, at some point in the scenario, you may want to randomly remove a number of individuals from the decision making process.)
- You have received an increasing number of calls from staff who have recovered from the flu.

Discussion

1. The Mayor, County Commissioners and/or City Council are urging the public to volunteer with community and faith based organizations to help out where they can.
2. What is the role of the school at this point in the event within your local community?

Summary

- Acknowledge that this scenario represents a “worst case” scenario and decide if future exercises (after improvement actions are taken) should function at this or a “better case” level based upon existing state planning estimates. This scenario is primarily to provide a baseline for planning purposes.
- Discuss how well your local community response plans are coordinated.
- Explain how you would prioritize needs at various points during the event (modules)?
- What role would, should or could the school and/or school system play within the local “formal” governmental and “not formal” non-governmental response to the event.
- Describe logistical challenges associated with a pandemic?
- Knowing that there will likely be a second wave of the pandemic influenza coming, how will you prepare for that? What will be different? What will be the same in that event?
- What planning elements will be helpful for other crisis/all hazards planning and might serve as a foundation for all preparedness planning?
- The exercise is designed to overwhelm your systems so you cannot fail. It will allow you to determine your present level of preparedness and illustrate what you need to do next.
- Provide an anonymous process evaluation form for participants and technical assistance providers to submit.