



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DHMH To Hold Three-Day Pandemic Flu Exercise *Maryland's healthcare community to play role*

BALTIMORE, MD (July 30, 2007) -- A three-day exercise to test Maryland's ability to respond to pandemic influenza in coordination with the state's healthcare partners begins on Tuesday, July 31, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) announced today.

"History tells us influenza pandemics are inevitable. Experts tell us the world is overdue for a pandemic," said Governor Martin O'Malley. "Maryland is a world leader in advanced biomedicine, and we are determined to stay ahead of any pandemic flu. This drill is an important step toward protecting our families in the event of an outbreak."

The Maryland exercise is a multi-jurisdictional and multi-organizational test designed to evaluate the State's ability respond to an influenza pandemic. A number of measures designed to contain and control a pandemic will be tested.

"Exercises such as this further our readiness and polish our ability to coordinate and respond," said DHMH Secretary John M. Colmers. "This particular event will help us to identify where our response plan is appropriate and where there is room for improvement."

The exercise scenario involves a new strain of human influenza virus that has been identified in the Far East. The virus spreads quickly via human-to-human transmission. This virus causes severe illness and deaths. As part of the exercise, cases have begun to appear in the United States and Maryland's surveillance system has indicated suspected cases in the state that are awaiting laboratory confirmation.

Many aspects of the exercise are unique and innovative. This will be the first time that Maryland's Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) will be used to conduct needs assessments as part of implementing home quarantine and community containment measures. Another is the hospitals' ability to reconfigure their facilities to handle an anticipated patient

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Pandemic Flu Exercise, page two

surge. Other aspects of the exercise include: testing the State's ability to receive and distribute medical supplies to critical personnel and hospitals; and activation of and communications with emergency operations centers.

"This exercise will test our ability to work with other state agencies, public and private partners, including acute care facilities," said Dr. Michelle A. Gourdine, DHMH deputy secretary for Public Health Services. "It will show us whether the 'theoretical' parts of our pandemic plan are useful and effective in practice."

Well before the emergence of global air travel, the 1918 Influenza Pandemic killed 50 million people worldwide. In October 1918, there were more than 7,000 deaths in Baltimore alone. A similar pandemic today could spread farther and faster and prove more deadly.

For more information about pandemic influenza and the current pandemic exercise, including a list of the exercise participants, click on 'Maryland Pandemic Flu Exercise, Summer 2007' at flu.Maryland.gov. To learn more about Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), visit <http://www.citizencorps.gov/cert/>

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