



Guide to Pandemic Influenza Planning for MRC Units

A Guide for Local MRC Units



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What Can Medical Reserve Corps Units Do to Prepare for an Influenza Pandemic?

Planning for pandemic influenza is critical for Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) units. The following guidance identifies important, specific activities that MRC units can do now to prepare for such an event. Although many of these activities are specific to pandemic influenza, a number of them also pertain to any public health or other emergency. This guidance is adapted from the *State and Local Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist*, which was developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and is located on the Federal government's pandemic influenza Web site (<http://www.flu.gov/professional/states/statelocalchecklist.html>). In addition, the guidance includes relevant elements from the *Business Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist* (<http://www.flu.gov/professional/business/businesschecklist.html>) and *Faith-Based & Community Organizations Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Checklist* (<http://www.flu.gov/professional/community/faithcomchecklist.html>); both documents were also developed by HHS and are available on the Federal government's pandemic influenza Web site (<http://www.flu.gov/professional/index.html>).

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. Pandemic influenza planning and response activities will be MRC unit- and community-specific. MRC units should engage in pandemic influenza planning and response activities in coordination with partner organizations in their communities. In addition, these activities should be within the purview, scope, training, and capabilities of the MRC unit.

What is an Influenza Pandemic?

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which there is little or no immunity in the human population. The disease spreads easily from person to person, causes serious illness, and can sweep across the country and around the world.

The 20th century saw three influenza pandemics:

- The 1918 influenza pandemic caused at least 675,000 U.S. deaths and up to 50 million deaths worldwide.
- The 1957 influenza pandemic caused at least 70,000 U.S. deaths and 1–2 million deaths worldwide.
- The 1968 influenza pandemic caused approximately 34,000 U.S. deaths and 700,000 deaths worldwide.

The characteristics and challenges of a pandemic include:

Rapid Worldwide Spread

- When a pandemic influenza virus emerges, its global spread is considered inevitable. Countries might delay the arrival of the virus through measures such as border closures and travel restrictions, but they cannot stop its spread.
- Preparedness activities should assume that the entire world population will be susceptible to the virus.

Overloaded Healthcare Systems

- Most people have little or no immunity to a pandemic virus. Infection and illness rates may soar. A substantial percentage of the world's population will likely require some form of medical care.
- Nations are unlikely to have the staff, facilities, equipment, and hospital beds needed to cope with large numbers of people who suddenly become ill.
- Death rates may be high from a severe influenza pandemic and may be largely determined by four factors:
 1. The number of people who become infected
 2. The virulence of the virus
 3. The underlying characteristics and vulnerability of affected populations
 4. The degree of effectiveness of preventive measures
- Past pandemics have spread globally in two and sometimes three waves.

Inadequate Medical Supplies

- The demand for vaccines is likely to outstrip supply.
- The need for antiviral drugs is also likely to be high during the early stages of a pandemic.
- A pandemic can cause a shortage of hospital beds, ventilators, and other supplies. Surge capacity at nontraditional sites such as schools may be created to cope with demand.
- Difficult decisions will need to be made regarding who receives antiviral drugs and vaccines.

Economic and Social Disruption

- Travel bans, closings of schools and businesses, and cancellations of events could have a major impact on communities and citizens.

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- Care for sick family members and fear of exposure can result in significant worker absenteeism.

Communication and Information

- Education and outreach are critical to preparing for a pandemic.
- Understanding what a pandemic is, what needs to be done at all levels to prepare for pandemic influenza, and what could happen during a pandemic helps us make informed decisions, both as individuals and as a nation.

Pandemic Influenza Planning Considerations for MRC Units

Note: *The following actions are not mandatory and may not be applicable to all MRC units. They are presented only for consideration by MRC units in planning and preparedness activities.*

MRC Involvement in Community Preparedness Leadership and Networking

- ❑ Ensure that the MRC unit is represented in the community's pandemic planning and preparedness task force (or similar group), which should include all relevant stakeholders in the jurisdiction, such as 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. This task force should articulate strategic priorities and oversee the development and execution of the jurisdiction's pandemic influenza response plan.
- ❑ Ensure that the community's emergency operations plan (EOP) or pandemic influenza response plan clearly delineates accountability and responsibility and accurately reflects the capabilities and resources of the local MRC unit.
- ❑ Ensure that the MRC-related elements of the jurisdiction's pandemic influenza response plan 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 that the pandemic influenza response plan or EOP addresses the assistance that the MRC unit can provide to medical special needs populations or other vulnerable groups in the community.
- ❑ If applicable, address any mental health support that the MRC unit can provide for the community, including support for patients, their families, and those affected by community containment procedures in the pandemic influenza response plan or EOP.

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- ❑ If applicable, ensure that the MRC unit is included in the epidemiology 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 that the pandemic influenza response plan or EOP identifies the legal authorities established to utilize MRC volunteers and protect them from liability in the performance of their volunteer duties.
 - ❑ Ensure that MRC volunteers are educated on existing legal protections when they are involved in a pandemic influenza response.
 - ❑ Ensure that the pandemic influenza response plan or EOP clearly describes the process necessary to request, activate, and utilize local MRC unit(s) and/or MRC volunteers.
 - ❑ Ensure that MRC volunteers are trained in and utilize the Incident Command System and comply with NIMS in the performance of their responsibilities, in accordance with the pandemic influenza response plan or EOP.
 - ❑ Ensure that 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 pandemic influenza response plan 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 pandemic.
- ❑ Determine how the MRC unit can assist each component of the healthcare delivery system (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 that this assistance is described in the pandemic influenza response plan or EOP.
- ❑ If applicable, ensure that the pandemic influenza response plan or EOP adequately describes MRC support for mortuary services during an influenza pandemic.
- ❑ Maintain a current roster of all active and former MRC members who may be available to support emergency operations. Ensure that procedures are established to contact, recall, and deploy MRC volunteers in an emergency.
- ❑ Ensure that 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 that credentialing of MRC volunteers is included in the community's (and/or state's) procedures for verifying the credentials of volunteer healthcare personnel. Ensure that MRC volunteers have provided information on licenses, certifications, training, and other pertinent information to authorities or agencies responsible for credentialing or verification of credentials of volunteer healthcare personnel.
- ❑ As appropriate, ensure that 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 that 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 that the MRC unit has access to Health Alert Network information.
- ❑ Ensure that MRC volunteers are educated about pandemic influenza and infection control and clinical guidelines, as well as personal preparedness methods.
- ❑ Ensure that the MRC unit is included in the jurisdiction's epidemiology or risk communications plan to regularly update providers as an influenza pandemic unfolds.
- ❑ As appropriate, ensure that MRC volunteers, especially clinicians, have access to The Epidemic Information Exchange (Epi-X) and are trained in its use.

MRC Support for Vaccine Distribution and Use

- ❑ Ensure that the MRC unit is included in state and local plans for vaccine distribution, use, and monitoring; and for communication of vaccine status.
- ❑ Ensure that 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 pandemic.
- ❑ Ensure that 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 vaccines and necessary equipment and supplies are available at all points of distribution (PODs) in the community; the security and logistical support for the PODs; and the training requirements for involved personnel.

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- ❑ As appropriate, ensure that the MRC unit can support the community's plans and procedures related to vaccine security issues, cold chain requirements, transport and storage issues, and biohazardous waste issues.
 - ❑ As appropriate, ensure that the MRC unit can support the community's plans and procedures for addressing the needs of medical special needs, vulnerable, and hard-to-reach populations during a pandemic influenza event.
 - ❑ Document with written agreements the commitments and participation of MRC volunteers in any pandemic influenza response or vaccination plan.
 - ❑ Ensure that MRC volunteers are considered for priority, along with first responders, healthcare providers, and other emergency services personnel, in the community's pandemic influenza response 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 that 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 to healthcare facilities that will administer them to priority groups.
- ❑ As appropriate, ensure that 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 pandemic.

MRC Involvement in Pandemic Influenza Emergency Response Exercises

- ❑ As appropriate, ensure that 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 that 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 that 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.

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- ❑ Determine the MRC unit's role in informing citizens in advance about the containment procedures that may be used in the community (as part of the MRC unit's involvement in the jurisdiction's epidemiology or risk communication plan, as appropriate).

MRC Involvement in Public Information and Risk Communication

- ❑ Assess readiness to support the jurisdiction's epidemiology or risk communication needs in preparation for an influenza pandemic, including regular review, exercise, and update of epidemiology or risk communication plans.
- ❑ Plan and coordinate MRC support for epidemiology or risk communication activities with government agencies, private industry, education, and nonprofit partners (e.g., local American Red Cross chapters).
- ❑ Identify and train MRC lead subject-specific spokespersons, if appropriate.
- ❑ Provide MRC volunteers with training on risk communication for use during an influenza 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 pandemic develops.
- ❑ As appropriate, support community resources, such as hotlines and Web sites, to respond to local questions from the public and professional groups.

Planning for the Impact of Pandemic Influenza on the MRC Unit

- ❑ Expect and allow for absences or unavailability of MRC volunteers during a pandemic due to factors such as personal illness, family member illness, community containment measures and quarantines, school or business closures, and public transportation closures.
- ❑ Encourage and track annual influenza vaccination for MRC members.
- ❑ Develop and disseminate programs and materials discussing pandemic 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 MRC volunteers during meetings and training sessions.
- ❑ Anticipate MRC volunteers' fear and anxiety, rumors and misinformation, and plan communications accordingly.
- ❑ Identify and/or develop platforms (e.g., hotlines, dedicated Web sites) for communicating pandemic status and actions to MRC volunteers in a consistent and timely way, including redundancies in the emergency contact system.

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- ❑ Ensure that MRC volunteers are aware of community sources for timely and accurate pandemic information (domestic and international) and resources for obtaining countermeasures (e.g., vaccines and antiviral medications).
 - ❑ As appropriate, ensure that 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 pandemic influenza response plan 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 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

Pandemic Influenza

Official U.S. government Web site for information on pandemic, H1N1, and avian influenza:
<http://www.flu.gov>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/>

H1N1 Influenza

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:
<http://www.flu.gov/individualfamily/about/h1n1/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

World Health Organization:
<http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>

Food and Drug Administration:
<http://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/PublicHealthFocus/ucm150305.htm>

Department of Homeland Security:
<http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/h1n1flu.shtm>

Avian Influenza

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/>

World Health Organization:

http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/

U.S. Department of Agriculture:

http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome?navtype=SU&navid=AVIAN_INFLUENZA

U.S. Geological Survey:

http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/avian_influenza/index.jsp

Seasonal Influenza

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

<http://www.flu.gov/individualfamily/about/seasonalflu/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>

World Health Organization:

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs211/en/>

Food and Drug Administration:

<http://www.fda.gov/BiologicsBloodVaccines/SafetyAvailability/VaccineSafety/ucm161448.htm>

Planning Guidance, Checklists, and Toolkits

National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza:

<http://www.flu.gov/professional/federal/#national>

HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan:

<http://www.hhs.gov/pandemicflu/plan/>

<http://www.flu.gov/professional/federal/>

HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan Fact Sheet:

<http://www.hhs.gov/pandemicflu/plan/factsheet.html>

Department of Homeland Security National Response Framework:

http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/editorial/editorial_0566.xml

<http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nrf/>

State and Local Influenza Planning Checklist:

<http://www.flu.gov/professional/states/statelocalchecklist.html>

Pandemic Planning: A Convening of the States:

<http://www.flu.gov/professional/states/convening.html>

Pandemic Influenza Planning: A Guide for Individuals and Families:

<http://www.flu.gov/individualfamily/familyguide.html>

Business Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist:

<http://www.flu.gov/professional/business/businesschecklist.html>

Pandemic Influenza Planning for Schools:

<http://www.flu.gov/professional/school/>

Pandemic Influenza Planning for Health Professionals:

<http://www.flu.gov/professional/hospital/>

Faith-Based & Community Organizations Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Checklist:

<http://www.flu.gov/professional/community/faithcomchecklist.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Pandemic Influenza Toolkit (for Healthcare Providers):

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/healthprofessional.htm>

Planning and Preparedness Tools (FluAid, FluSurge, CommunityFlu, etc.):

<http://www.flu.gov/professional/planningtools.html>