



Pandemic Influenza

Get Informed...Be Prepared

A newsletter for Minnesota organizations preparing for a possible influenza pandemic.

February 2007
Vol. 2. No. 2

Ferretting out answers:
Science publishes theory on how virus mutates from avian to human-to-human flu

In this issue of *Pandemic Influenza*, we report on research using ferrets to discover how an avian virus can become easily transmissible from human to human. Terrence M. Tumpey and colleagues at the CDC and Mount Sinai School of Medicine report in *Science* (Vol. 315, No. 5812, p. 582) that two point mutations in the hemagglutinin (the H of H5N1) of the 1918 virus changed it from a mammalian influenza strain to an avian strain. Ferrets exposed to the 1918 virus got sick; those exposed to the mutation did not. Tumpey's theory is that similar mutations in the H could change an avian strain to a pandemic flu. See <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/short/315/2812/582>.

Also in this issue:

- Find new OSHA guidance on preparing workplaces for pandemic flu, page 2.
- Exercise on school closure and disease containment measures will be available to partners via CD, page 3.

CDC Issues Interim Guidance on Community Disease Containment for Pandemic Influenza Planning

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued the Interim Pre-pandemic Planning Guidance: Community Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Mitigation in the United States on February 1, 2007. The guidance applies to community disease containment and the early, targeted and layered use of non-pharmaceutical interventions to prevent the spread of a pandemic influenza virus.

The purpose of the guidance is to plan for use of interventions to help limit the spread of a pandemic, prevent disease and death, lessen the impact on the economy and maintain societal function. It includes a Pandemic Severity Index, provides planning recommendations for each level of severity, suggests when these interventions should be started and outlines how long they should be used (see figure 1, page 2.)

The guidance outlines three major goals for the use of non-pharmaceutical interventions:

- 1) Delay the exponential growth in incident cases and shift the epidemic curve to the right in order to "buy time" for production and distribution of a well-matched pandemic strain vaccine;
- 2) Decrease the epidemic peak; and
- 3) Reduce the total number of incident cases, thus reducing community morbidity and mortality.

A community disease containment workgroup began researching community disease prevention strategies and will develop a state guidance based on the CDC framework. Minnesota's guidance is scheduled to be submitted to the CDC on March 15, 2007. To obtain the federal guidance, see the federal Web site at <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/community/commitigation.html>.

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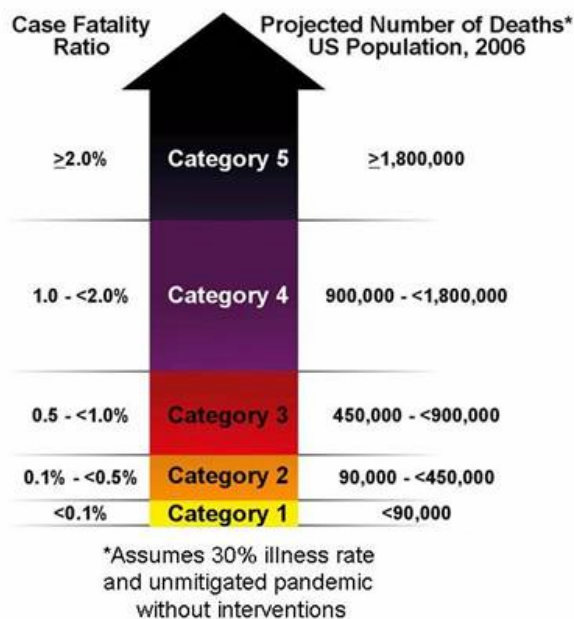
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February 2007

Volume 2, Number 2

Figure 1: Severity Projections from the Community Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Mitigation



OSHA Releases New Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for a Pandemic

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) unveiled a new guidance February 6 for employers preparing their workers for a pandemic influenza. *Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for an Influenza Pandemic*, was prepared in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

“Employers and employees should use this guidance to help identify risk levels and implement appropriate control measures to prevent illness in the workplace,” says Edwin G. Foulke, Jr., assistant secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health. See the guidance at http://www.osha.gov/Publications/influenza_pandemic.html.

The guidance includes:

- A description of the differences among seasonal, avian and pandemic influenza;
- Information on the impacts of a potential pandemic;
- An overview of how a virus is likely to spread; and
- Information about how exposure is likely to occur.

Cross Border Infectious Disease Conferences Planned for Late March

Avian and pandemic influenza have no respect for borders, so it’s important to partner with neighboring states and nations when planning for an outbreak. The northeast region is stimulating dialogue with Canada during two conferences scheduled in late March.

The purpose of the two Cross Border Infectious Disease Conferences is to improve surveillance, communication and response to a pandemic influenza or infectious disease outbreak at the international border. Officials from Ontario and Minnesota will discuss preparedness for public health and hospitals, infectious disease control, customs and border protection, and more. An infectious disease scenario and community forum will also take place during the all-day events in Grand Portage on March 27, 2007, and International Falls on March 29, 2007. For more information, contact Bonnie Holz, MDH public health preparedness consultant for the northeast region, at (218) 723-4645.

Battle of Britain: Suffolk Turkey Farm is Site of Avian Flu Outbreak

Public concerns about “bird flu” ratcheted up in the U.S. after tests confirmed that the H5N1 virus had killed 2,600 turkeys at a Suffolk, England, farm. Reports on prime time television network news reminded many that the virus continues to spread westward, despite strict controls. According to British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) news, within one week in February 2006, a number of countries reported their first cases of wild birds with confirmed H5N1 infection, including Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Germany, Austria, France, Slovenia, India, Iran and Egypt. Four different subtypes of H5N1 have been detected so far, all of which are deadly to birds and can cause disease or death in humans.

Fear Factor: Seasonal Flu Fatalities in Minnesota Light up the MDH Info Line

Closer to home, five seasonal flu fatalities among Minnesotans is an unusual occurrence, causing worried parents to call the Minnesota Immunization Information Line in droves. Flu shot clinics filled quickly, but vaccine remains available. Parents looking for a flu shot clinic in their area can visit the MDH Web site at <http://www.mdhflu.com>.

Public Information Campaign

Are You **codeReady** for a Minnesota Public Preparedness Campaign?

The State of Minnesota in the form of an “R” anchors a new brand, codeReady, for the joint MDH-DPS/HSEM Emergency Preparedness Public Information Campaign. (We’re keeping it under wraps until the May 1 roll-out date, but it looks good, in a Minnesota kind of way.) The contractor, StoneArch Creative, developed the design to signal its statewide scope, urgency (playing off of the “code red” implication), and connection to other “ready” resources, such as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security “Ready √,” DPS’s “Ready Minnesota,” the Red Cross “Get Ready!” and Sherburne County Public Health’s “Are You Ready?” campaigns, among others. The new brand was introduced to the Campaign Advisory Group on February 15. Other proposed campaign tactics include non-traditional marketing at local events, a Web site, a tool kit with materials that can be personalized to the locality, and a media/advertising campaign.

Don’t stay up until midnight waiting for the expensive television commercials to air, however. The average cost of making a national television commercial was \$343,000 in 2000, according to a *New York Times* article on the topic. This doesn’t include purchasing the on-air time for television commercials. The media/advertising will most likely consist of newspaper ads, radio spots, public service announcements, Web ads and other options that are more targeted, local and frugal. For more information about the campaign, contact Emily Litt, pandemic flu planning coordinator, at (651) 201-5556.

Exercises

K-12 School Closing Exercise Challenged Participants, Forged Partnerships

Imagine that a pandemic flu outbreak is gaining momentum, and the Governor recommends closing schools to prevent the spread. Who announces the closing to parents? Should school staff come in to work and write curricula or plan lessons to be sent to children’s homes? Does food service stay open to feed kids on the school lunch program? How do parents keep kids out of class from congregating at the Mall and eliminating all of the disease control benefits?

On January 29, 108 policy makers from emergency management, public health, education, transportation and state services gathered to discuss these and other issues in a pandemic influenza tabletop exercise, “K-12 School Closure as a Disease Containment Measure.” Officials discussed their options – all under the watchful eyes of observers who recorded their deliberations. The participants included a Cities Readiness Initiative jurisdiction, Dakota County; urban area, Rochester; rural area, Carlton and Douglas Counties; and suburban area, Carver County. The MDH is developing CD-ROMs of the exercise and materials for use by regional and local partners, which should be available in early March. For more information about the exercise or CD-ROMs, contact Emily Litt, pandemic flu planning coordinator, at emily.litt@health.state.mn.us.



Exercise participants at the January 29 tabletop planned strategy and discussed options for closing local schools.

Operationalizing the Plan

State Plans for Community Disease Containment, Antiviral/Vaccines due to CDC March 15

The MDH is working quickly to meet federal deadlines for state Community Disease Containment and Antiviral/Vaccine Plans. DHHS guidance on the Community Disease Containment plan arrived on February 1, so timeframes are tight on completion. However, once these plans are approved, regional and local partners will have clarity on state roles and responsibilities – and can plan for their jurisdictions with confidence.

Communication Planning

MDH Pandemic Influenza Annual Progress Update to Be Completed in mid-March

See how MDH is preparing for a possible pandemic in a new report, *Pandemic Influenza: Annual Progress Update*. It provides an overview of how MDH fits into a pandemic influenza response, gives updates on each technical section of the *MDH Pandemic Influenza Plan*, and outlines future goals and challenges. Look on the MDH Web site in mid-March to find it online.

ECHO Relays Flu Info to LEP Populations

The Minnesota Emergency and Community Health Outreach (ECHO) Collaborative is making influenza information available through its Web site, as well as via a phone-based service with pre-recorded flu messages in multiple languages. ECHO Phone – the phone based service – is available toll-free at 1-888-883-8831. The languages offered by ECHO Phone include Hmong, Khmer (Cambodian), Lao, Oromo, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Vietnamese and English.

ECHO now is available through the GovDelivery system, and subscribers can receive notices when new health or emergency preparedness materials or translations are available. Here's how: Click on <http://service.govdelivery.com/service/user.html?code=MNORGECHO> and edit your contact information. Update your profile to add a secondary address, create a new password, or change your preferred subscription items. Then answer two questions so that ECHO can identify your agency type, location, and primary language spoken at home.

Pandemic Flu Digest

Nothing beats a quiet Minnesota evening curled up in front of a crackling fire with hot cocoa and a good pandemic flu report! Okay, maybe not, but these are excellent reads anyway...

Resources

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has released four new publications for school emergency planning:

- Components of Comprehensive School and School District Emergency Management Plans.
- Steps for Developing a School Emergency Management Plan.

- Updating and Maintaining School Emergency Management Plans.

Find these resources and many others at the ED's Emergency Response and Crisis Management Technical Assistance Center Web site under Helpful Hints at <http://www.ercm.org/index.cfm?event=hints>.

- HSEM's Avian and Pandemic Influenza Regional Business Symposiums are bringing people to the table to discuss how to keep businesses operational during an outbreak. Fact sheets from the symposiums are available on the Department of Public Safety, HSEM Web site at http://www.hsem.state.mn.us/Hsem_Subcategory_Home.asp?scatid=128&catid=5.
- If you are a software fan, CDC has a new tool for you. FluWorkLoss is planning software that estimates the potential number of days lost from work due to an influenza pandemic. Check it out at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/tools/fluworkloss/>.
- If you haven't seen the new pan flu PSAs from the Immunization Coalitions Assistance Center, you're missing a treat. Children ask their parents intelligent questions about family preparedness, prompting "Aha!" moments for the adults. See <http://www.izcoalitionsta.org/category.cfm?id=25>.

The Last Word...

According to a February 7 report in the *New York Times*, you can buy anything on the open market, even avian flu (rendered harmless through laboratory manipulation). Indonesia, the country with more human cases of avian flu than any other, won't send gratis samples of virus strains to the World Health Organization (WHO). Instead, Indonesia signed a memorandum of agreement to sell its strains to a private company for vaccine research. A spokeswoman for Indonesia's Health Ministry told Reuters News Service that the country "cannot share samples for free."



Dr. David L. Heyman, WHO's chief of communicable diseases, is in discussion with Indonesian officials. "Now that this has happened," he said, "we have to... figure out how to rectify it."