Community Engagement Project Summary

Pandemic Influenza planning is a priority public health issue for the State of New York. Over the past few years, concern over the possible emergence of an influenza virus that could lead to a pandemic has created the need for increased public health preparedness, pandemic education, and planning. The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) and local public health organizations desire to raise public awareness of current pandemic planning assumptions and strategies within targeted audiences. The State and community organizations wish to educate the public, as well as ascertain to what extent individuals’ knowledge, attitudes and beliefs are aligned with current State core planning assumptions. This will allow the State and local organizations to be better prepared, as well as prepare the citizens of New York for an influenza pandemic. Having this information will provide a reality check for the planning process and identify gaps, barriers, and unintended consequences that would impede a successful response during a public health emergency. State and local public health officials hope to create an ongoing dialogue about complex issues and bring together diverse parties to consider solutions to inform New York’s pandemic influenza planning.

The NYSDOH collaborated with The Keystone Center and other key partners in public health preparedness, including local health departments (Cortland County, Chautauqua County, and Nassau County) and the University at Albany Center for Public Health Preparedness to host daylong, public engagement meetings at four sites on April 12, 2008. Planners attempted to recruit 25-30 participants for meetings in Cortland County, Chautauqua County, and Nassau County and 45-50 participants for one meeting in the Albany area. The goal was to have representation from at-risk/vulnerable populations such as the elderly, individuals with disabilities or mental health issues, tribal nations, minority New Yorkers and vulnerable children. The objective was to have both service providers and consumers at these meetings.

Each meeting followed a similar structure to keep interactions and information being gathered consistent. Following greetings by the local health organization, the NYSDOH, and The Keystone Center, participants watched a video providing background information necessary to have an informed discussion on pandemic influenza. After a question and answer session, participants met in facilitated small group discussions and addressed a series of questions meant to discover specific needs of at-risk populations during a pandemic.

General themes that emerged during discussions were issues of trust, self-reliance, taking action in the community, and stockpiling essential items, particularly the difficulty of having sufficient prescription medications on hand, which was noted at three of the meeting locations.

Through polling and discussion, participants identified the following specific areas of need for at-risk populations during a pandemic:
1. **Stockpiling:** Participants are confident in their ability to stockpile food, essential supplies and medicine if they are given information about how to do this and what items are needed. Regulations need to be adapted to support/allow storage of prescription medications. In addition, plans must be made to help those in the community for whom stockpiling might be difficult.

2. **Access to Quality Information:** Information about all aspects of pandemic planning should come from health care providers, help-lines, and community and governmental leaders.

3. **Medication:** Participants’ willingness to take and give medication that might help them but has not been proven safe would hinge on whether the benefits outweigh the risks, especially concerning children.

4. **Governmental Support:** Every level of government must build capacity and demonstrate that all people are being treated fairly in terms of pandemic planning and preparedness.

5. **Community Support:** Communities should begin active planning by drawing on interested individuals and networks to provide necessary education, support, and resources, especially relating to childcare and provision of essential supplies.

6. **Health Care System:** The health care system must address issues of aging workers and the policy for staff retention during a pandemic.

7. **Economics:** Economics as a motivating factor for compliance to public health guidance must be examined.

8. **Personal Preparedness:** Individuals must be motivated to become prepared.

9. **Social Distancing:** Individuals must be informed about what they would be asked to do in the event of a severe Individuals for whom complying with social distancing might pose a hardship need to be identified in advance and alternatives devised.

Following polling, some participants met for a focus group to assess their meeting. The most frequent suggestion from focus group participants was that citizens wanted to come away from the meeting empowered to become active in their communities. Facilitators and note-takers also emphasized that participants wanted something to take away from the meeting such as a specific charge, resources, or information.

These important insights will be useful for the NYSDOH as the department continues its pandemic planning.
Neighborhood Project: Host a Food and Supplies Drive!

Getting Started: Host a food and supplies drive to help stock necessities for those in need. Stocking up now will make it easier for your community during a flu pandemic, or other emergencies that may arise, when stores may be out of supplies or not accessible.

Set a Goal: Aim high! Set a pounds-per-person goal, or ask people to fill a certain number of bags.

Planning:
- Select a coordinator to lead the drive.
- Appoint team captains to take charge of the promotion, kickoff events, and competitions.
- Find a corporate sponsor to store the supplies.
- Coordinate the delivery of supplies to the storage location.

Promote Your Drive and Get the Word Out:
- Display posters in high-traffic areas.
- Publicize the drive in your publications and bulletins.
- Send e-mail messages and make announcements at meetings.
- Distribute food/supply collection bags, flyers, and donation envelopes.

Create Incentives:
- Give prizes to or sponsor a party for the team that collects the most food/supplies.
- Add fun categories: the most tuna or peanut butter or the most enthusiastic collectors.

Make It Fun:
- Build momentum with daily updates on your progress.
- Challenge other groups in your community.
- Hold a kickoff event: Make the admission price a bag of food or supplies.

Schedule Deliveries and Pickups: Offer to pick up items from community members if they are unable to bring them to the drive.

Celebrate Success: Have a post-drive party to congratulate yourself on a job well done!

Want to know more? Visit www.pandemicflu.gov or www.nyhealth.gov for additional information!
Sample Newsletter Article on Stocking Food and Supplies

A flu (influenza) pandemic is an outbreak of a new flu virus that spreads around the world. The virus will spread easily from person to person, mostly through coughing and sneezing. Because the virus is new to people, everyone will be at risk of getting it. Experts don’t know exactly when the next flu pandemic will occur, but they say it will happen. During a flu pandemic, you need to be ready to take care of yourself and your family. Preparing now is crucial.

One simple step you can take is to stock supplies for an extended stay at home. During a pandemic, if you cannot get to a store because the virus is spreading in your community or if stores are out of supplies, it will be important for you to have extra supplies on hand. These can also be useful in other types of emergencies. Store a 2-week supply of water and food. Store the following types of food:

- Nonperishable foods (those that will keep for a long time) that do not require refrigeration
- Easy-to-prepare foods
- Foods that you and your family regularly eat. Examples include ready-to-eat canned meats, fish, vegetables and soups; peanut butter, protein or fruit bars; and bottled water.

Also, it is important to remember other necessities that are often overlooked:

- Other essential supplies, such as soap or alcohol-based (60%–95%) hand wash, cleaning supplies, a flashlight, batteries, toilet paper, and tissues
- Nonprescription drugs and other health supplies on hand, including pain relievers, fever reducers, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines, fever thermometer, fluids with electrolytes, and vitamins
- First aid supplies, including
  - First aid manual
  - Assortment of sterile adhesive bandages
  - Sterile gauze pads
  - Over-the-counter drugs (aspirin, antidiarrheal medication, activated charcoal)
  - Antiseptic ointment
  - Soap
  - Latex gloves
  - Tongue depressors
  - Tweezers, needles
- Regular prescription drugs to ensure a continuous supply in your home.

You may wonder how it is possible for you to “stockpile” prescription drugs when your health care provider and/or insurance policy limit how often you can get refills. Talk to your provider about prescribing a 90 day supply of the medicines you take regularly. If your policy allows you to refill your prescription one or two days before you run out, make sure to do that every time. In a few months, you will have an extra supply. Remember, expired drugs can lose their potency, so use your older medications first. Also, high temperatures can affect the potency and stability of many prescription medications. Some pharmacists recommend storing prescription drugs in a box on a closet shelf. That will keep them out of bathroom heat and humidity, and out of the hands of children.

Want to learn more? Visit www.pandemicflu.gov or www.nyhealth.gov for additional information!
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and other leading health experts agree that the threat of a flu pandemic is real and urge all levels of society to prepare. A flu (influenza) pandemic is an outbreak of a new flu virus that spreads around the world. The virus will spread easily from person to person, mostly through coughing and sneezing. Because the virus is new to people, everyone will be at risk of getting it.

Pandemics have occurred repeatedly throughout history. The most severe—the flu pandemic of 1918—was responsible for over 50 million deaths worldwide and affected roughly one-fifth of the world’s population. Now, experts are concerned that the H5N1 virus (bird flu) is changing and could cause the next human flu pandemic.

If a pandemic of similar severity to that of 1918 were to occur today, estimates are that 90 million Americans could become ill, and nearly 2 million could die. In addition to the dramatic human toll, a flu pandemic poses a major threat to the global economy.

The government alone cannot prepare the nation for a pandemic. Our position in the community gives us a unique, powerful “voice” for spreading the word about this threat. Our leadership is essential in encouraging our group’s “families” to prepare now to ensure that both they and their loved ones are ready to withstand a flu pandemic.

Preparation now, before an outbreak, could reduce sickness, death, and failed businesses. There are specific steps to help our group get prepared. Simple actions will help, such as encouraging our group to stock up on supplies to make it easier to stay at home, and to practice proper hand washing.

Government leaders at HHS and CDC are asking employers, faith-based leaders, community leaders, and medical professionals to use their influence to inform Americans of the threat a pandemic poses and to encourage preparedness. Resources are available to help you communicate this information quickly and accurately.

Help spread the word. Go to www.pandemicflu.gov/take-the-lead/ or visit www.nyhealth.gov to learn more about pandemic preparedness and your role.