

Pandemic Flu Preparedness for Healthcare Facilities

Background

Influenza is a common cause of respiratory illness, requiring healthcare visits and hospitalization. During the influenza season, outbreaks of healthcare associated influenza affect both patients/residents and personnel in long term care facilities and hospitals. The purpose of this technical guide is to help healthcare facilities prepare for the presence of a pandemic influenza virus in their facility.

Introduction

Pandemic influenza is a flu that causes global outbreak, or pandemic, of serious illness that spreads easily from person to person. Pandemic flu can occur anytime during the year. It results from a new influenza virus that becomes easily transmitted from human to human. Because it is new, no one would be immune to the virus and it is anticipated that immunization would not be available. The disease might seriously affect people of all ages, not just the very young and the very old.

Transmission risk in healthcare facilities (including hospitals, long term care, and out patient facilities) depends on the extent of pandemic influenza activity in the community and pandemic influenza activity in the facility. During a pandemic, adherence to infection prevention and control policies and procedures is critical to minimize the transmission of pandemic influenza and other infectious diseases. The pandemic influenza response for escalating infection control measures will be based on pandemic influenza activity and transmission risks.

The following items should be considered in order to prepare for the presence of a pandemic influenza virus in your facility:

- Develop an internal multi-disciplinary planning committee for influenza preparedness.
- Establish a linkage with local or regional emergency preparedness groups
- Specify the circumstances under which the plan will be activated
- Describe the organization structure that will be used to make the plan operational
- Outline the responsibilities of key personnel related to executing the plan
- Create a written business continuity plan that includes the following elements:
 - Medical screening and surveillance plan (detection of influenza in patients, residents, and staff)
 - Communication plan (identify public health points of contact such as local or state health department contacts or key contacts in trade or professional organizations).
 - Education and training plan (to ensure that all personnel, residents/patients and family members of the ill person understand the implications of, basic prevention and control measures for, pandemic influenza)
 - Triage and/or admission plan
 - Facility access plan – an infection control plan is in place for managing patients/residents, or visitors with pandemic influenza.
 - Occupational health plan
 - Vaccine and antiviral use plan
 - Address issues related to surge capacity

- Identify strategies to increase bed capacity
- Determine anticipated durable and consumable resource needs
- Strategy for handling increased numbers of deceased persons

Conclusion

By learning about pandemic influenza and defining how various planning assumptions might affect a facility's operations, a business operator can anticipate steps needed to mitigate such impacts.

Additional Resources:

Human Services Pandemic Influenza Plan is available at: www.hhs.gov/pandemicflu/plan.

Pandemic Influenza in Healthcare Settings: <http://osha.gov/Publications/3328-05-2007-English.html>.

Considerations for Antiviral Drug Stockpiling by Employers in Preparation for an Influenza Pandemic
http://www.pandemicflu.gov/vaccine/antiviral_employers.html.

Centers for Disease Control: <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>.

Additionally, it is a good idea to review any state or local plans that may exist relative to your facility in order to incorporate them into your preparedness plan.

References

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (2006, January). NC Pandemic Influenza Plan.

Centers for Disease Control (2006, May). Long Term Care and Other Residential Facilities Pandemic Influenza Checklist.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2005, November). Pandemic Influenza Plan, Supplement 3.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact your local PMA Risk Control Consultant.

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