



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Pandemic influenza medical surge plan exercise set for July 24

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health will conduct a full-scale exercise at Garrett Coliseum July 24 to demonstrate actions that would be taken should there be an outbreak of pandemic influenza in this area.

State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson said, "Preparing our state for the possibility of a global influenza pandemic is a huge responsibility, and it is one which depends on cooperation of everyone involved to be successful."

This one-day exercise will simulate a situation in which large numbers of citizens are becoming ill from influenza. In this scenario, only the sickest patients will be sent to the hospital and home care will be stressed. An alternate care site also will be set up to care for influenza patients who have no caregiver. Finally, the exercise will demonstrate the distribution of antiviral medications to priority groups.

The state-level exercise will encompass several components of the state's operational plan including; the incident command system, an antiviral point of dispensing (POD) site, an alternate care site, and identification of available hospital beds. The medical surge component is the focus of the exercise, but other components have been added to simulate a more realistic event and response.

The Montgomery City/County Emergency Management Agency, Montgomery Fire/Rescue, Alabama Hospital Association, Alabama Department of Public Safety, local hospitals, American Red Cross, volunteers and health department staff from the Anniston, Mobile, Montgomery and Selma regions are participating in this exercise.

The purpose of all emergency preparedness exercises is to identify gaps in planning, so that these gaps can be addressed before an emergency occurs. This exercise will improve the state's all-hazard plan, as well as the pandemic influenza plan.

An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges among humans and spreads easily from person to person. Because the virus is new to humans, people have little or no immunity and the virus spreads worldwide.

Experts predict a pandemic influenza will likely occur again and every citizen will be affected. Individuals, families, businesses, churches and communities should be preparing to minimize the impact of a pandemic. The 1918 influenza pandemic led to high levels of illness, death, disruption in services, and huge economic loss. For more information visit: www.pandemicflu.gov or www.adph.org/pandemicflu.

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