



## **PANDEMIC FLU “TABLE TOP” EXERCISE BRINGS HEALTH EXPERTS, BUSINESSES, AND COMMUNITY GROUPS TOGETHER TO PREPARE FOR THE IMPACT OF AN OUTBREAK**

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**Los Angeles, Calif., October 11, 2006** – A “table top” hypothetical scenario to examine the impact pandemic flu could have on Los Angeles, California, and the country, was held today at The California Endowment’s Center for Healthy Communities. The simulation exercise brought together leaders from government, business, education, and community and faith based groups to gain an increased understanding of the challenges each sector could face during a pandemic outbreak, and how to better prepare for the potential threat.

Featured speakers included First Lady of California, Maria Shriver; U.S. Assistant Secretary for Health, John Agwunobi; California Health and Human Services Secretary, Kim Belshé; Director of the California Department of Health Services (CDHS), Sandra Shewry; and author of *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History*, John Barry. The event was hosted by Trust for America’s Health (TFAH) with support from The California Endowment, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The Homeland Security Advisory Council Region One, in partnership with the Business Executives for National Security (HSAC/LA BENS) and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce co-hosted the business sector of the event.

“This table-top is an important demonstration of how everyone in every area of society would be affected by a pandemic outbreak. We should focus on making difficult decisions ahead of time, rather than waiting until we are in a state of emergency. These range from the potential need to close schools to how hospitals will handle an overflow of patients to ensuring we proactively address the needs of vulnerable populations,” said Jeff Levi, PhD, Executive Director of TFAH. “Americans are resilient, but knowing what to expect and how to prepare will ensure the country will bounce back faster from the impact of a pandemic.”

The hypothetical scenario was based on an outbreak beginning in Southeast Asia with the first human case in the U.S. occurring in Los Angeles. The participants were presented with tough decisions, such as how to prioritize providing care with limited amounts of vaccine available, when to shut down major public gatherings, and what to do if food and other basic supplies are in short supply due to breakdowns in manufacturing and supply-chain distribution.

“Protecting the public’s health goes way beyond what the government can prepare for on its own. Businesses and other community groups play crucial roles in preparing for a pandemic and other health threats,” said Joe Byrne, Executive Director of the Los Angeles Chapter of the Business Executives for National Security (HSAC/LA BENS). “This event is important to help clarify the responsibilities and expectations of both the private and public sector, so we will all be better prepared to face emergencies that may arise, such as a pandemic, together.”

The event will result in fostering improved and ongoing public health emergency preparedness and response collaboration between the public and private sectors, as well as helping to encourage increased planning by businesses and community groups.

“Pandemic influenza may be the biggest public health challenge of our time,” said Shewry. “Individuals, communities, private industry, and all levels of government need to actively prepare for the threat of pandemic flu. California has the essential building blocks in place to protect the public from an influenza pandemic. However, we must continue to strengthen our preparedness.”

The table top scenario, including lessons learned, will be produced into a documentary and will be made available as a resource for other communities to assist in their pandemic preparedness efforts.

“Today was a milestone in pandemic preparedness planning for the city, state, and nation,” said Jonathan Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. “As the first real hands-on pandemic exercise involving health officials, government, business, health care, and a wide range of sectors in the community, this effort provides a practical assessment illustration how everyone can and must work together to bring necessary resources to the table. Doing so will help mitigate the impact a pandemic would have.”

*Trust for America’s Health is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority. [www.healthyamericans.org](http://www.healthyamericans.org)*

*The California Endowment, a private, statewide health foundation, was established in 1996 to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities, and to promote fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians. The Endowment makes grants to organizations and institutions that directly benefit the health and well-being of the people of California. To date, The Endowment has awarded more than 8,000 grants across California totaling nearly \$1.6 billion. For more information, visit The Endowment’s Web site at [www.calendow.org](http://www.calendow.org).*

*The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation’s largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful, and timely change. For more than 30 years the Foundation has brought experience, commitment, and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. Helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need—the Foundation expects to make a difference in our lifetime. For more information, visit <http://www.rwjf.org>.*

*The Pew Charitable Trusts serves the public interest by providing information, advancing policy solutions and supporting civic life. Based in Philadelphia, with an office in Washington, D.C., the Trusts will invest \$248 million in fiscal year 2007 to provide organizations and citizens with fact-based research and practical solutions for challenging issues. [www.pewtrusts.org](http://www.pewtrusts.org).*

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