



**TRUST FOR AMERICA'S HEALTH FINDS ADMINISTRATION'S PANDEMIC FLU PLAN PRAISEWORTHY, HOWEVER, SERIOUS FLAWS STILL MUST BE ADDRESSED**

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Washington, DC, November 1, 2005 -- The following is a statement by Jeffrey Levi, PhD, Senior Policy Advisor for Trust for America's Health (TFAH):

“Today’s release of a national strategy and budget request is a clear demonstration that the Administration is taking the pandemic flu threat very seriously. Release of these documents will help assure that our nation is better prepared to respond to pandemic flu and should be commended. However, some significant gaps remain. First, the budget request does not adequately fund support for state and local health departments, surge capacity, and risk communication. State and local health departments will be at the forefront of the pandemic response. \$100 million is not nearly enough to allow them to prepare. Additionally, requiring each state to purchase antivirals separately does not make sense from a health perspective. Germs don’t respect jurisdictional boundaries, and we must have the flexibility to provide the medication where outbreaks are most severe.

Second, the national strategy document lacks the substance and level of detail needed to prepare for the impact a pandemic could have on the economy, business operations, transportation, and other crucial areas of daily life. Finally, it is disturbing that the plan calls for the Department of Homeland Security to be in charge of the response, essentially divorcing the expertise that will be needed to respond to a complicated health threat from the top chain of leadership.

We hope the Administration and Congress will work together quickly to fix the flaws and create a complete preparedness initiative.”

TFAH notes key highlights from the plan and budget request include:

- A major commitment to increasing U.S. vaccine production, including support for improving vaccine production technology. Vaccines represent the most important potential protection against a new, severe flu strain. This proposal recognizes that a large investment must be made to revitalize and modernize the broken vaccine industry in this country.
- Stockpiling significant levels of antiviral medication. The request reflects a move toward stockpiling enough antivirals to cover approximately 75 million people,

enough to treat 25 percent of the U.S. population -- the amount the World Health Organization (WHO) suggests countries plan for. This indicates the U.S. will catch up with the level of antivirals that other countries have already ordered to protect their citizens, and begin to bolster the quantities in hand.

TFAH hopes the Administration and Congress will address the following weaknesses in the plan and request:

- A reliance on states to pay for a substantial portion of the cost of purchasing enough antiviral medication to cover their population. This would place a \$510 million burden on the states, which amounts to an unfunded mandate. Further, if states are asked to be responsible for the purchase of antivirals, there should be measures taken to ensure that they are able to purchase the medication at a lower nationally-negotiated cost, rather than purchasing at a higher rate on a state-by-state basis. Pandemic influenza is a national threat. The level of protection Americans receive should not be determined by where they live and the fiscal position of their states.
- The additional federal investment in state and local preparedness activities would total only \$100 million, while at the very same time, states would be expected to purchase \$510 million worth of antiviral medications. In contrast, the Senate has provided \$600 million for state and local preparedness activities and increasing surge capacity in the FY 2006 Department of Defense Appropriations bill and in the FY 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations bill, both of which need to be finalized by conference committees and the full Congress. Moreover, funding for general state and local preparedness, cut in the House and Senate Labor, Health and Human Services by up to \$130 million, has yet to be restored.
- Contingency planning and surge capacity are not funded in this request. Funding is needed for states, localities, and private sector health care organizations to fully prepare for a pandemic – ranging from identifying surge capacity for health care facilities to creating distribution systems for vaccine and antiviral delivery and continuity planning for critical businesses and public services. Estimated need: \$250 million.
- Improved availability of diagnostics and reagents is not funded in this request. These funds are critical for laboratories across the country if they are to identify the emergence a pandemic strain in a particular locality. Estimated need: \$75 million.
- Notwithstanding the launch of pandemicflu.gov, risk communication is inadequately funded. The federal government must take the lead in supporting a national effort to assure that all sectors of society understand the implications of a pandemic. Ways to communicate with the public, corporate America, and the health care community and specific messages about risks and advise must be

developed. TFAH estimates this will take an investment of at least \$150 million to effectively communicate with all sectors of American society and help reduce public panic.

TFAH pandemic flu-related materials are available at <http://healthyamericans.org/reports/flu/>

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*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)*