

THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS

2005 Market Street, Suite 1700
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103-7017
Telephone: 215.575.4800
Facsimile: 215.575.4890

NEWS

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Contact: Anne Desmond, 202-207-2137
Mona Miller, 202-207-2135

The Pew Charitable Trusts Supports U.S. Pandemic Planning Project

*\$1.5 million will assess adequacy of federal and state pandemic disease preparations;
Work with businesses to develop and put plans in place*

(PHILADELPHIA) – In response to the threat that avian flu could transition into a human pandemic, The Pew Charitable Trusts announced today a \$1.5 million investment to ensure that key decision makers at the federal, state and local levels are responsibly developing and executing plans to protect Americans from this or other widespread public health threats. The Trust for America’s Health (TFAH), a national non-profit health advocacy organization, will oversee the **Pandemic Preparedness Initiative**, which will assess the government’s pandemic influenza response and evaluate how well the federal and state plans are being implemented. In addition, the project will bring together experts to educate and engage business leaders, media and the public in effective pandemic planning exercises.

The grant reflects broad public health concern over the rising possibility that the H5N1 avian flu will mutate to an easily transferable human virus, putting millions of American lives at risk. Recently, a weaker strain of the virus was detected in North American poultry, raising speculation as to how long it will be before the deadlier strain reaches the U.S. While avian flu is currently considered a likely trigger for a pandemic, it is only one of many possible public health threats warranting national preparedness strategies.

“Considering what is potentially at stake, it is critical that an independent assessment of the government’s pandemic preparedness efforts is available to both policymakers and the public,” said Rebecca W. Rimel, president and CEO of The Pew Charitable Trusts. “In addition, we want to work with the corporate sector to anticipate major economic disruptions that a pandemic would cause and help them identify strategies for minimizing the effects to the greatest extent possible.”

Over the next two years, the project will work with relevant experts in fields such as health, economics, risk communications and public policy to develop “report cards,” issue briefs and analyses on both the federal and state governments’ response plans. Additionally, conferences and informational materials on pandemic planning activities will be developed and targeted to segments of the private sector.

“The Pew Charitable Trusts’ longstanding commitment to groundbreaking public policy research will significantly enhance TFAH’s efforts to assess and report on our nation’s readiness to combat a pandemic flu outbreak,” said Lowell Weicker, Jr., TFAH Board President and former

three-term U.S. senator and governor of Connecticut. “We are deeply grateful for the Trusts’ partnership in encouraging business, governments and other key communities to be better prepared for one of the world’s greatest looming health threats.”

Since 1998, the Trusts has invested in projects and initiatives to strengthen the nation’s public health system, including the establishment of TFAH in 2001. The Trusts has committed nearly \$6 million to TFAH to provide information and champion policies that strengthen the public health system and protect Americans from existing health threats as well as new and emerging ones. TFAH has continued to thrive as one of the country’s leading public health advocates, helping to keep attention focused on disease tracking and prevention as a national priority.

“As Americans become more concerned by the risk of avian flu and other possible major health threats, we are pleased to join forces with TFAH once more to address our nation’s response capacity to pandemic disease,” said Rimel.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in a normal flu season, more than 200,000 Americans are hospitalized and an average of 36,000 die of influenza-related complications. Health economists estimate that the U.S. economy experiences a loss of approximately \$10 billion in direct medical expenses and lost productivity. But if a pandemic were to strike, some experts estimate that as many as 89,000 to 1.7 million Americans could die, and that more than two million Americans could need hospitalization. Economists predict that the U.S. economy could lose between \$70 billion and \$160 billion in medical expenses and lost productivity.

To learn more about The Pew Charitable Trusts, this project, and its other public health initiatives, visit www.pewtrusts.org.

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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 \$204 million in fiscal year 2006 to provide organizations and citizens with fact-based research and practical solutions for challenging issues.