



Federal Pandemic Preparedness 6 Month Progress Laudable, TFAH Says, But Cautions Vigilance Must Stay High During Next Stage of Plan

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WASHINGTON, December 18, 2006 – Trust for America’s Health (TFAH) today commended the federal government’s progress in executing a majority of the six month benchmarks in the national pandemic preparedness implementation plan.

“This first phase of the federal pandemic preparedness plan moved at full speed ahead,” said Jeff Levi, PhD, Executive Director of TFAH. “It has been an historic government-wide effort, and the release of the results demonstrates a serious commitment to transparency and accountability, allowing Americans to see how well their tax dollars are being spent to improve preparedness for a major health emergency.”

“The initial progress has been highly encouraging, but it is essential now that a new wave of funding be provided to implement the next phases of the plan. A pandemic poses a monumental threat to the country and the economy, with predictions that between 25 to 35 percent of the population could become ill. We must remain vigilant and continue to act with the urgency the situation requires,” Levi continued.

Last year, Congress allocated funds to begin federal pandemic flu preparedness activities. According to a review by TFAH, approximately \$2 billion in additional funds are needed to meet the President’s original funding request made last fall. TFAH urges the President to include the request for these additional funds in the FY 2008 budget.

TFAH still remains concerned about the country’s overall level of preparedness for a flu pandemic. Last week, TFAH issued “Ready or Not? Protecting the Public’s Health from Diseases, Disasters, and Bioterrorism,” which found that half of states scored six or less on a scale of 10 possible indicators for health emergency preparedness capabilities. The report is available on TFAH’s Web site at www.healthyamericans.org/reports/bioterror06.

Some highlights from the federal accomplishments announced today include:

- As of December 15th, all federal departments have certified that their pandemic flu plans are in compliance with a comprehensive checklist detailing preparedness requirements;
- International animal and human disease surveillance has been significantly enhanced;
- International information-sharing about the use of animal vaccines and inter-pandemic human vaccines has been improved;
- The Justice Department has advised Governors on processes for obtaining federal law enforcement assistance and federal military assistance;
- The Departments of Interior and Agriculture have tested nearly 60,000 samples from wild birds in their H5N1 surveillance efforts;
- Laboratory capacity has grown, including \$11.4 million in new contracts to companies working to develop new diagnostic tests;
- Protocols and tools for liability protection for vaccine manufacturers have been established, as required by the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act.

- Guidance has been provided to the Medical Reserve Corps to better coordinate volunteer health care providers; and
- The Department of Homeland Security released a "Pandemic Influenza Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Guide for Critical Infrastructure and Key Resources, including contingency plans and guidance for businesses.

Some key federal responsibilities that must continue to be addressed include:

- Establishment of a temporary “State of Emergency” health benefit to cover the uninsured and underinsured during a mass health emergency;
- Establishment of emergency extended sick leave provisions to encourage workers to stay home when they could be infected;
- Improvement in surge capacity capabilities, including integrating non-public resources;
- Development of community mitigation strategies to slow the spread of disease;
- Continuing to expand and fortify the volunteer medical workforce;
- Developing and implementing a comprehensive and integrated risk communications strategy;
- Resolving issues around diminished standards of care during a severe pandemic; and
- Prioritizing populations for distribution of limited antivirals and vaccine once it is available.

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 and www.pandemicfluandyou.org.

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