



Influenza A H1N1 (Swine Flu) Pandemic Planning for Agencies within Continuums of Care

This document provides interim guidance to Continuums of Care (CoC) and their homeless service providers (i.e., emergency shelters, transitional and permanent housing providers, etc.) as needed. CoCs should contact their State and local public health departments or visit the Center for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov for more information. Thanks to the Seattle-King County Public Health Department for sharing critical elements of its Influenza Pandemic Planning Guide for Homeless and Housing Service Providers¹ to assist with the development of this guidance.

Homeless service organizations provide resources and services that citizens depend upon 24 hours a day. Frequently, individuals and families who are homeless or near homeless have no alternate source for housing, food, basic medical care and other life sustaining services. Therefore, it is critical for homeless service providers to engage in specific planning measures to maintain their normal level of services (at a minimum) during any major event. A flu pandemic is of particular concern for homeless individuals and families and for the organizations which serve them. Several factors that place the homeless population at higher risk during a pandemic are:

- Tendency to live in more crowded conditions;
- Spend days and nights outdoors exposed to conditions that may exacerbate illness;
- Living with a variety of chronic and acute health conditions which could affect immune response;
- May not seek care until very sick;
- May be living with mental health and or substance abuse issues making it more difficult to appropriately respond to the situation;
- As community resources become more utilized by the general public, those that rely on those resources (i.e., homeless individuals and families) may be disproportionately affected;
- Disruptions in public transportation may cause those experiencing homelessness to be disproportionately affected;
- Lack of a safety net;
- Lack of funds or medical insurance to pay for treatment and or medications; and,
- Limited access to media outlets and therefore less likely to be fully aware of the gravity in the situation.

As the outbreak of Influenza A H1N1 continues to spread, it is important that Continuums of Care and the organizations within take steps on how to respond to a potential outbreak among the homeless populations within their communities. There are specific planning steps Continuums of

¹ For a copy of their full guide please download it at:

http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/personal/HCHN/~/_media/health/publichealth/documents/pandemicflu/panflu_guidelines_homeless.ashx

Care and homeless service providers can take immediately, that will improve their ability to respond effectively should an outbreak occur. Making early policy decisions will provide a framework to ensure both staff and program participants are supported. Critical decisions for homeless service providers include:

- In your agency, who will be responsible for communicating with public health authorities? Who on your staff will stay informed of local/state/federal health advisories? How will staff and program participants be informed of updated information? How will inaccurate information be dispelled?
- What is your program's current policy on providing care to participants that become ill? Is it possible to begin screening current participants for flu symptoms? How will the agency connect with health authorities to maintain a level of care for those who are sick or become sick?
- Does the organization have sufficient employees and/or volunteers to maintain current level of care should some staff get sick? What guidance can be provided to staff to keep themselves safe during an outbreak of flu? What resources are available to staff that have concerns?
- Is it possible for programs that typically only operate at night to support 24/7 operation during an outbreak? If not, where will infected participants go during the day? For family programs, can the shelter support families that want to keep their children home from school? Is the program sufficiently staffed in the event the community's schools are temporarily closed?
- Are hygienic supplies such as hand sanitizer readily available for use by participants and staff?

For More Information:

- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website for the most recent U.S. information (<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>).
- Contact the local public health department for information in your community. To find a health department in your state go to <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/international/relres.html>.
- Contact your local Information and Referral program (i.e., 2-1-1) for local information.
- Call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Hotline at 1-800-CDC-INFO.