

Scenario for Public Engagement On Community Control Measures Against Pandemic Influenza At Home, School, Work, & Play

The World Health Organization has confirmed ongoing human-to-human transfer of a dangerous influenza virus in several countries and has determined that an influenza pandemic is underway.

Impact of Disease: The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention has advised that the pandemic influenza virus is likely to reach one or more of the contiguous 48 states within 30 days and is expected to be affecting communities across the country within several weeks. Community outbreaks will last about 6-8 weeks and about 30% of the community will develop illness. The pandemic is being judged as a severe one and may cause up to two million deaths and ten million hospitalizations in the US. A second pandemic wave will occur three months after the first wave.

Vaccine, Drugs, and other Materiel: The Department of Health and Human Services is funding the development of a vaccine against the pandemic influenza virus and intends to acquire enough for all US citizens. However, the first lots of this vaccine are not expected to be available for 4-6 months. Anti-viral drugs will be in short supply and will likely be kept for treatment of ill persons and certain front line emergency workers. Face masks or respirators may be recommended for some situations, but supply is uncertain and should not be counted on for general use.

Control Measures: Communities are advised to consider various strategies (also called community control, community containment and social distancing measures) that might help slow the spread of the influenza pandemic since at this time we cannot rely on other measures for this purpose. Experts are not certain how effective these control measures would be, but it is possible that used early, and in combination, they could significantly reduce and/or delay the number of cases. The five-part community control measures being proposed for implementation are:

1. encouraging people sick with influenza to voluntarily stay at home until well, at least for a week (self-isolation);
2. encouraging the non-ill household contacts of people with influenza to also voluntarily stay at home (self-quarantine) for at least 7 days;
3. canceling large public gatherings;
4. closing schools and day care facilities for up to 12 weeks or for the duration of the local epidemic, and keeping young children and teenagers from gathering in large groups elsewhere; and
5. encouraging people to voluntarily work from home or take leave.

Impact of Control Measures: The consequences of implementing this five part package of control measures are expected to be substantial, including loss of wages or income from business, disruption of services at hospitals, banks, stores and other facilities, loss of work for parents and guardians of school age children, and restraints on people's freedom of movement and freedom to gather. These types of effects, or more severe ones, might be seen eventually even if the control measures are not implemented.

Decision: Leaders must weigh the benefits as well as the negative consequences of implementing the control measures before deciding whether or not to implement 1) all, 2) some, or 3) none of the proposed control measures. **What option should they choose? If the choice is to implement one or more of the control measures, what problems must be addressed or lessened to assure successful implementation? When is best to implement control measures?**