

The WHO Checklist for Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Planning

During the 20th century, influenza pandemics caused millions of deaths, social disruption and profound economic losses worldwide. Influenza experts agree that another pandemic is likely to happen but are unable to say when. The specific characteristics of a future pandemic virus cannot be predicted. Nobody knows how pathogenic a new virus would be, and which age groups it would affect. The impact of improved nutrition and health care needs to be weighed against the effect of increased international travel or simultaneous health threats. The level of preparedness will also influence the economic and medical impact of the disease and the final death toll. However, even in one of the more conservative scenarios, it has been calculated that the world will face up to several 100 million outpatient visits, more than 25 million hospital admissions and several million deaths globally, within a very short period.

The objective of pandemic planning is to enable countries to be better prepared to recognize and manage an influenza pandemic. Planning may help to reduce transmission of the pandemic virus, to decrease cases, hospitalizations and deaths, to maintain essential services and to reduce the economic and social impact of an influenza pandemic.

Many countries have gained experience in pandemic planning and response through dealing with the threat or reality of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). Lessons learned during these outbreaks have been used when preparing the checklist, with SARS representing the first emerging infectious disease in the millennium and HPAI representing a real pandemic threat of global significance. Experience with these outbreaks has shown that there is always room for improvement in pandemic preparedness.

The checklist, prepared by the World Health Organization for the benefit of its Member States worldwide, reflects international expert opinion on the subject of influenza pandemic preparedness planning.

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West Coast Office:
1673A SW Montgomery Drive
Portland, OR 97201
USA
Phone: (503) 248-2233

East Coast Office:
279 Veleros Court
Coral Gables, FL 33143
USA
Phone: (305) 205-5042

email: info@crisissimulations.com
web: www.crisissimulations.com