



VA PANDEMIC INFLUENZA PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *VA Pandemic Influenza Plan* is an operational document that is being added to existing emergency plans of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide VA and its three administrations with a foundation for preparation, response, and recovery stages of an influenza pandemic. The VA's three administrations are the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA).

Section 1 – Introduction provides an overview of the functions and nationwide scope of the Department of Veterans Affairs. It describes VA's three major missions of caring for veterans, providing benefits, and memorializing them, as well as its fourth mission of assisting with emergencies and disasters. This section also explains how this plan augments established emergency plans, describes what VA has already done to be prepared for pandemic influenza, and lists planning assumptions about pandemic influenza and its impact.

This section states the goals of VA's plan, which are:

- To describe how VA will protect its staff and the veterans we serve, maintain operations, cooperate with other organizations, and communicate with stakeholders
- To assist VA staff at the local level establish and implement pandemic influenza-specific emergency procedures
- To assist VA, VHA, VBA, and NCA leadership at the national, regional, and network levels to support our staff and functions at all levels and all sites
- To be clear and understandable, with easy-to-find material that can be rapidly disseminated

Section 2 - Preparing for Pandemic Influenza outlines the actions that VA, its three administrations, and its regional, network, and local facilities (medical, benefits, and memorial) will take to increase understanding of the risks of pandemic influenza, and enhance preparedness for it. The section defines procedures and processes that would be used to prepare VA, throughout the Department, for the special and dire circumstances that would result from pandemic influenza. VA health care is in the special situation of preparing to care for those who are ill with pandemic influenza, so the VHA discussion includes:

- How the workforce and physical sites will be prepared
- What infection control and countermeasures will be put into to place or enhanced, and assessments of what medical materiel will be necessary
- Identification of essential functions
- Estimation of the possible surge in demand
- Plans for health care delivery under the dynamic environment caused by pandemic influenza
- Support of health care facility staff who are exposed to or become ill with pandemic influenza
- Provision of mental health support for patients and staff
- Surveillance and reporting
- Increased security
- Effective communications

Subsections for VBA and NCA describe workforce planning, infection control, security, and communication. The section ends with a description of VA-wide pandemic influenza outbreak exercises that will help the Department test and refine its plans.

Section 3 – Responding to Pandemic Influenza describes how VA will use its plans to stop, slow, or limit the spread of disease, reduce suffering and death, and sustain operations. The discussion includes:

- Surveillance, including possible first case
- Refocusing of patient care priorities to maximize care of patients with pandemic influenza
- Infection control, including the precautions and personal protective equipment by health care facility staff
- Support for and management of exposed or ill staff
- Use of countermeasures (antiviral drugs, vaccines, diagnostics)
- Workforce considerations including flexible work standards, credentialing, and approaches to staffing
- Patient care including changing demands, providing assistance via phone, triage, diagnosis, isolation, use of alternative space and sites, and altered standards of care that may become necessary
- Medication and supply issues
- Security
- Fatality management
- Mental health support
- Communication within and outside of VA

Section 4 – Recovering from Pandemic Influenza briefly reviews key steps toward resuming normal operations.

Section 5 provides a list of acronyms and abbreviations, as well as a glossary of terms.

The last section provides more than 15 **appendices** in five groups:

- *Appendix Group A* includes a diagram and maps of VA and facts about VA health care.
- *Appendix Group B* covers VHA's potentially expanded responsibilities and legal authorities and policies relevant to emergencies
- *Appendix Group C* includes references to VA emergency plans and other key documents
- *Appendix Group D* offers planning tools, including sample standard operating procedures for pandemic influenza, planning action grids, communication principles and elements, and lists of durable and consumable supplies for medical facilities
- *Appendix Group E* contains response action grids, charts of precautions for health care facility staff and public health measures for all, an actions checklist for a first case of pandemic influenza, a sample self-triage algorithm, and a home care guide.

This plan augments VA's existing emergency plans and provides an operational foundation for preparation, response, and recovery stages of an influenza pandemic, VA will develop and disseminate more information and planning and response documents and will test our plans to further strengthen our preparedness and response.

VA resources on influenza, both seasonal and pandemic, can be found

at <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/flu/>