



BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY SUB PANEL MEETING

September 30, 2009

Welcome/Administrative Comments

Marc Follmer opened the meeting by thanking sub panel members for their participation.

New Member Introductions

We would like to welcome the new members of the sub panel:

- Mark Anderson of Dollar Tree
- Nancy Perry of the Virginia Beach hotel/motel association and
- Sudesh Aggarwal of the Virginia Credit Association

H1N1 Preparedness for the Business Community

Bob Mauskopf, Director of Emergency Operations, Logistics and Planning and Dr. Mark Levine, Deputy Commissioner for the Virginia Department of Health, briefed the subpanel on the latest developments on the H1N1 Virus and planning preparations:

Virginia's preparations have focused on five areas:

1. Communication
2. Surveillance
3. Mitigation
4. Medical Care/Surge
5. Prevention/Vaccination

Communications:

Following the initial outbreak of the H1N1 flu virus in April/early May, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Office of Commonwealth Preparedness have been actively providing the business sector with critical and timely information such as the number of confirmed H1N1 cases and locations as well as H1N1 avoidance techniques including proper cough etiquette, importance of hand washing, stay home if ill, etc. VDH have hired a public relations firm to further assist in communicating this important information to the business community.

Surveillance:

Virginia is very fortunate compared to other southern states such as Alabama and Texas that have reported a substantial number of H1N1-related illnesses. Virginia's H1N1 activity has been sporadic and in pockets. VDH currently receives updates and reports on flu-like activity from physicians, emergency rooms, hospitals, healthcare facilities, and the Department of Education. VDH would like to begin receiving updates from subpanel members on the number of absent workers reporting H1N1-like symptoms. As of the end of September, no Virginia school has been closed due to H1N1. Schools are urging parents to keep sick students at home.

Mitigation:

VDH has begun to deliver Personal Protection Equipment to various healthcare facilities, hospitals, etc.

Medical Surge:

VDH is evaluating surge capabilities of healthcare facilities; may be looking at opening healthcare facilities such as free clinics.

VDH has accumulated stockpile of over 700,000 courses of antiviral medications that are available and ready for distribution when anti viral medications are unavailable in the commercial supply chain. Distribution will be through a major supplier and to pharmacies and distribution points. VDH has also received additional anti viral courses from the federal government. The Department of Medical Assistance Services has a computer system that tracks the stockpile inventory.

Prevention/Vaccination:

VDH continues to promote seasonal (non-H1N1) flu vaccinations. The Centers for Disease Control recently announced the initial allotment of the H1N1 vaccine – an inhalable vaccine – which will be made available for priority groups, such as pregnant women, healthcare providers, children and young adults, and those with chronic health disorders. 3,000 private providers have been signed-up to administer the vaccinations including local health districts. This should be a free vaccination; however, there might be a dispensing fee for special needs patients.

VDH recommendations for businesses:

Workforce preparation

- Expect your employees to become ill;
- Assume your vendors and suppliers will also be affected.
 - make sure your continuity of operations plans are up to date
- Cross train employees to assume the duties of those who become ill;

- Preach social distancing;
 - Management needs to be on the look out for ill workers;
 - Employees that display signs of the flu should be sent home and directed not to come into work;
 - The Department of Human Resource Management is discouraging state employees from coming to work when sick;
- Encourage repeated hand washing.
- Use of N95 or other masks is not recommended.
- Recommend to your employees to visit the CDC website if they have questions. (www.vdh.virginia.gov, www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu).

Question: Is it true that physicians are overwhelmed with providing documentation to workers for their supervisors?

Yes; physicians have been inundated with these requests. The CDC has requested businesses not to require workers to obtain physician confirmation of H1N1 virus. These requests will bog down physician's offices trying to treat patients.

VDH has opened a Public Inquiry Center since the opening of school and can answer H1N1 questions. The number is 1-877-275-8343.

Question: Is the H1N1 virus sure to become an epidemic?

In the United States, the spread of H1N1 is in pockets and very hard to predict. Texas, California and New York were hit hard during the spring outbreak and most of their populations will be immune. VDH uses GIS technology to track and identify the outbreaks. It is hard to tell the difference between the seasonal flu and the H1N1.

VDH is planning public events to draw the 18-24 demographic to get vaccinated.

Question: Is there any guidance on who should not get vaccinated? Is it safe?

There are no indications that H1N1 vaccination is dangerous. It is based on the seasonal flu vaccine and has been tested. The Food and Drug Administration has approved the H1N1 vaccine; however, always check with your physicians before taking any vaccinations.

Roundtable Discussion

Several Subpanel members shared their thoughts and experiences on H1N1 preparedness for the workforce and their workplace planning. Consistent themes expressed by many included education of and communication with employees and partners about H1N1. Many are revisiting their absentee/leave/work from home policies. Several will increase cleaning and sanitation of their common areas.

Target Corp. (Nicole McCain and Calvin Royal):

Target has been developing a comprehensive plan to prevent and prepare for a pandemic event for over 5 years. Main focus has been on educating the Target team on the flu. Target's plan encourages ill workers to stay home. Their communications involve regular updates from senior management. They maintain an internal website containing information (and a link to the CDC website) and include a "frequently asked questions" section. Target provides free flu shots for team members. Their goal is the health and well being of their members and customers.

Target is in the process of performing a detail review of their human resource policies. They are evaluating and addressing each individual in a consistent manner; stay home and get better. Target has increased the cleaning of their stores. Hand sanitizers for cashiers.

Dominion Power (Gerard Dabney and Barbara Wichser):

Dominion Power is a large organization with 17,000 employees, 20 million customers over 13 states. Continuity of operations plans are in place and continue to be updated. Business units have developed templates to ensure the core value of safety remains, critical resources are kept in place with up to a 35% rate of absenteeism. This plan has been tested and adjusted based on the results. For instance, Corporation Security has 50 people employed and their focus is on access/monitoring control 24 hours/7 days a week in shifts. They developed a plan to keep this critical component going.

Dominion also is increasing their technology support for their employees to work at home. Approximately 10,000 of its employees have the ability to work remotely.

Dominion is looking at preventive measures. Putting hand sanitizer and tissues in common areas, annual free flu shots, communicate monthly with employees and post information to internal website.

McGuire Woods (John Dawson):

McGuire Woods is routinely upgrading and testing their computer system so more employees can access it remotely. An internal website has been established for employees that has information on H1N1, the status of McGuire Wood's H1N1 activities, the "Tip of the Week" and links to the Centers for Disease Control and other organizations.

Hand sanitizers are being used in common areas, conference rooms are being cleaned better and more frequently. Trying to institute a higher awareness and promote personal hygiene. McGuire Woods is continuing to review their policies.

Smithfield Foods (Dennis Pittman):

Smithfield provides free flu shots for employees. It has not experienced any increased absenteeism at this point but posts prevention information at all its sites. Smithfield takes a liberal view with employee sick leave as well.

North Highland Consulting (Scott Hammer):

North Highland shared some of their experience in working with various Commonwealth agencies as well as private sector businesses on pandemic flu planning.

Businesses need to evaluate the strength and planning of their suppliers, the supply chain in general, distribution systems and customer needs. Businesses wrestle with how to prevent people from viewing sick leave as extra vacation time but North Highland encourages their clients to review their personnel policies and offer additional leave for sickness.

Businesses should consider negotiating with their suppliers to obtain preferred customer status and be at the head of the line.

Troutman Sanders (Steve Gravely):

Steve Gravely has worked with the Commonwealth on health law, preparedness and disaster planning and offered his legal perspective on the discussion:

Businesses and critical infrastructure providers have been getting prepared for the pandemic flu for the past five and ten years. With the early flu and SARS outbreaks, the critical infrastructure sections received a wake up call and have remained opened and have sustained operations.

The major areas confronted by businesses include:

Employees – have to be a businesses top priority; how to deal with their safety and welfare with an infectious disease. Surveillance of employee illness in the workplace is complicated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and being compliant with preparedness efforts for the H1N1 virus. Business also needs to be aware of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations to maintain a safe workplace.

Some states have begun requiring vaccinations – New York has mandated vaccines for all healthcare workers; Massachusetts on the verge as well. Visibility of the vaccination issue is still unclear.

Mitigation – Hospitals are considering limiting visiting hours and not allowing children to visit. It is uncertain whether H1N1 will qualify as Force Majeure under contracts and there will be questions of liability when dealing with suppliers.

Are there enough masks and gloves for care givers, the public, etc. Non-healthcare facilities are not using N95 masks. They could be dangerous if not properly fitted.

Question: Are hospitals and healthcare facilities ready for a mass casualty event?

Virginia has an excellent system in place and a strong partnership with the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association. VDH has spent a lot of time looking at an extreme

surge and compared to other states Virginia is fairly well positioned. VDH has a robust Medical Reserve Corps with over 10,000 volunteers. These volunteers will assist in the vaccination campaigns.

Roundtable Comments:

Examples of what other businesses/local governments are doing:

- Free flu shots.
- Post on internal websites information on how best to protect your family.
- Establishing liberal leave policies.
- Landlords are increasing cleaning cycles.
- The Prince William County Health District made a video on the proper way to sneeze. Please visit <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/PandemicFlu/PromisingPractices.htm> and scroll down to the bottom to Sneezing 101 Video.
- Organizations should have a strong, recognized spokesperson to get the information out; education is very important.

Credentialing Task Force

(Issuance of identification to businesses entering affected areas following a disaster.)

The Virginia Information Technologies Agency has advised they will not require any review before the software is procured. The Department of Emergency Management's procurement office is assisting and has been delegated procurement authority. There are still contractual agreements to be worked out with the Attorney General's Office. Otherwise a working test will be completed by the end of the year.

Funds are being raised to purchase the software. The Department of Planning and Budget will set up a special account for the Department of Emergency Management to use for this program only. This allowed us not to go through the General Assembly for funding. It will take \$50,000 to stand up the software for the first year; the Department of Emergency Management will absorb the cost of the system maintenance in to their bi-annual budget after the first year.

Education Task Force

(Designing a web-based education program for small businesses on continuity of operations planning)

Mary Loose DeViney and Marc Follmer have been working with Dr. Jason Levy's Homeland Security classes at Virginia Commonwealth University in an attempt to enlist students to gather data from local employers on preparedness planning to help with the design and content of the website. A private programmer has been donating his time and has established the basic web functions and the Virginia Commonwealth University will be the host of the site. There will be ten questions rating the business on preparedness; this will be the hook to interest them to go through the entire web-based program. The Task Force is trying to garner grant funds to pay the programmer.

Mary Loose DeViney announced that Piedmont Community College has developed a Business Continuity of Operations class for this spring.

Information Sharing Task Force

Still working with the Department of Homeland Security on the best way to configure the Virginia Portal on the Homeland Security Information Network.

Closing

Leigh Middleditch and Marc Follmer thanked all panel members for their participation and closed the meeting.

Resources

Department of Health – www.vdh.virginia.gov

Department of Health Public Inquiry Center – 1-877-275-8343

Centers for Disease Control H1N1 Website – www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu

Department Health and Human Services Flu Center – www.flu.gov

OUR FINAL MEETING WILL BE HELD IN THE 1ST WEEK OF DECEMBER. I WILL SEND OUT FURTHER DETAILS ONCE A DATE IS CHOSEN.