

A HEALTHIER AMERICA: 10 TOP PRIORITIES FOR PREVENTION

Preventing and Controlling Pandemic Flu and Other Infectious Diseases

WHY ARE INFECTIOUS DISEASES A THREAT TO OUR NATION'S HEALTH?

Infectious Diseases Are Spreading:

- Thirty-nine new infectious diseases have been identified over the past 40 years, including HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).²
- Older infectious diseases, including malaria and tuberculosis, have mutated and developed increased drug resistance, making them harder to treat.³
- Airlines now carry more than 2 billion passengers a year, making it possible for any diseases they may have to pass from one country to another in a matter of hours.⁴
- The regular seasonal flu kills 36,000 Americans and hospitalizes 200,000 yearly.⁵
- More than one million Americans are living with HIV/AIDS, with an estimated 40,000 new cases each year.⁶
- An estimated 4.1 million Americans have been infected with the hepatitis C virus (HCV), of whom 3.2 million are chronically infected.⁷

Pandemic Flu Poses A Particularly Ominous Threat:

- A severe pandemic flu outbreak could result in 90 million Americans becoming sick, 2.2

million deaths, and the second worst U.S. economic recession since World War II.⁸

- Since 2003, there have been more than 352 humans infected with H5N1, the avian flu virus that scientists fear could become the next pandemic for humans (As of January 2008). Of the 348 humans infected, 219, or 62 percent, have died worldwide.⁹
- Children and teens are particularly vulnerable -- nearly 46 percent of H5N1 "bird" flu deaths have been individuals between the ages of 0-19.¹⁰

Measures for Preventing and Controlling Infectious Disease Are Antiquated and Inadequate:

- The Institute of Medicine (IOM), Government Accountability Office (GAO), and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have found America's public health system to be fundamentally unprepared to respond to major modern health threats.^{11,12,13}
- The federal and state governments have failed to provide public evaluation of preparedness and pandemic planning on a state-by-state basis, limiting the ability to gauge progress and identify vulnerabilities.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO BETTER PREVENT AND CONTROL INFECTIOUS DISEASES?

- **Increase and Better Coordinate Federal-State-Local Government and Private Planning and Preparedness.** The government should take the lead on preventing disease, and all jurisdictions should work together to create policies that follow best infection-control practices with the federal government providing strong leadership.

Government at all levels should work to engage the private health care system and communities in their plans and efforts. Sufficient resources must be devoted to preparing for possible disease threats and the government should be transparent about their actions and held accountable for protecting the public.

"I WOULD LIKE TO EMPHASIZE THAT ALTHOUGH WE CANNOT BE CERTAIN EXACTLY WHEN THE NEXT INFLUENZA PANDEMIC WILL OCCUR, WE CAN BE VIRTUALLY CERTAIN THAT ONE WILL OCCUR AND THAT THE RESULTING MORBIDITY, MORTALITY, AND ECONOMIC DISRUPTION WOULD PRESENT EXTRAORDINARY CHALLENGES TO PUBLIC HEALTH AUTHORITIES AROUND THE WORLD."¹¹

— DR. ANTHONY S. FAUCI,
DIRECTOR, NATIONAL
INSTITUTE OF ALLERGY
AND INFECTIOUS DISEASES,
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF
HEALTH, DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND HUMAN
SERVICES

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PREVENTING EPIDEMICS.
PROTECTING PEOPLE.

- **Prepare for Mass Emergencies.** During mass emergencies, measures must be put in place to care for a potential surge of patients, including creating alternative care sites and recruiting additional health care personnel. An emergency health care benefit and improved sick leave policies should be enacted to allow the uninsured, underinsured, and people without adequate sick leave to receive care and take time off during major infectious disease emergencies like a pandemic flu outbreak.
- **Emphasize Prevention, Care, and Treatment for Chronic Viral Diseases, Including HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis.** Addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic, hepatitis, and other chronic viral diseases must include increased funding for treatment and care, as well investing in proven prevention methods, including clean needle and needle exchange programs and other science-based behavioral prevention.
- **Enhance Research and Development of Vaccines and Public Health Technologies.** Basic technology and tools of public health must be modernized to adequately protect the American people. This includes research and development of vaccines and new technologies; and improved chemical laboratory testing capabilities.
- **Increase Childhood and Adult Vaccinations.** Vaccines prevent disease in the people who receive them and protect those who come

into contact with unvaccinated individuals. Vaccines help prevent infectious diseases and save lives. Vaccines are responsible for the control of many infectious diseases that were once common in this country, including polio, measles, and mumps.¹⁴

- **Modernize Disease Surveillance Systems.** Every health department and health agency should be part of a 21st century surveillance system that meets national standards and is interoperable between jurisdictions and agencies to ensure rapid information sharing. Plans should ensure adequate laboratory surveillance of influenza and other infectious diseases, as well as testing for pathogens such as *E. Coli*, Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus* (MRSA), and extensively drug resistant Tuberculosis (XDR-TB). The U.S. should take the lead on improving global disease surveillance.
- **Replenish and Augment the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS).** The government should ensure the SNS contains enough vaccines, antiviral medications, and supplies to respond to public health crises, and states must be better prepared to distribute and administer needed medications to the public.
- **Clarify Existing State and Federal Roles in Setting Quarantine and Isolation Policies.** The federal government, in coordination with the states, must establish clear legal authority and emergency measures to effectively contain the spread of disease.

ENDNOTES

- 1 A.S. Fauci. *The Role of NIH Biomedical Research in Pandemic Influenza Preparedness*. Testimony Before the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, and Education, United States House of Representatives. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, 2005. <http://appropriations.house.gov/_files/AnthonyFauciTestimony.pdf> (accessed May 18, 2005).
- 2 World Health Organization. News Release: *International Spread of Disease Threatens Public Health Security*. Geneva: WHO, August 23, 2007. <<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2007/pr44/en/index.html>>
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Key Facts about Seasonal Influenza (Flu)." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm> (accessed October 12, 2007).
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- 7 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Hepatitis C Fact Sheet." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/c/cfact.pdf> (accessed January 28, 2008).
- 8 Trust for America's Health. *Pandemic Flu and the Potential for U.S. Economic Recession: A State-by-State Analysis*. Washington, D.C.: Trust for America's Health, 2007. <<http://healthyamericans.org/reports/flu/recession/>>
- 9 World Health Organization. "Cumulative Number of Confirmed Human Cases of Avian Influenza A/(H5N1) Reported to WHO," Updated January 3, 2008, http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/country/cases_table_2008_01_03/en/index.html (accessed January 9, 2008).
- 10 Trust for America's Health and the American Academy of Pediatrics. *Pandemic Influenza: Warning, Children At-Risk*. Washington, D.C.: TFAH, October 2007.
- 11 Institute of Medicine. *The Future of the Public's Health in the 21st Century*. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press for the Institute of Medicine, 2003.
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- 13 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Public Health Infrastructure – A Status Report*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2001.
- 14 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "The Importance of Childhood Immunizations." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006. <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/importance.htm> (accessed January 23, 2008)

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www.healthyamericans.org
 OR CONTACT TRUST FOR
 AMERICA'S HEALTH DIRECTOR
 OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
 RICHARD HAMBURG,
RHAMBURG@TFAH.ORG
 OR 202-223-9870 x 18


 WWW.HEALTHYAMERICANS.ORG
 1730 M Street NW • Suite 900
 Washington, DC 20036
 (t) 202-223-9870
 (f) 202-223-9871
www.healthyamericans.org