

## Special Edition

Feb. 21, 2006

# Pandemic influenza summit inspires preparation

By Joyce Allard, IDPH Community Education Coordinator

“The history of pandemics isn’t really the history of public health,” U.S. Health and Human Services (DHHS) Secretary Mike Leavitt said at Iowa’s Pandemic Influenza Planning and Response Summit hosted by Gov. Tom Vilsack on Feb. 3. “The history of pandemics is really the history of mankind.”

Leavitt is visiting every state in the U.S. during the first four months of this year to bring together state and local health officials as concerns grow about a possible pandemic.

Iowa’s summit, attended by more than 400 people, was Leavitt’s ninth. He was joined by Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and James Caverly, director of the Infrastructure Partnerships Division of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

“Pandemics are a biologic fact of life,” Leavitt said. “They



*DHHS Secretary Mike Leavitt (center) was in Des Moines on Feb. 3 as a guest of Governor Tom Vilsack. He was accompanied by CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding and other federal officials.*

are part of the unseen world of viruses and bacteria and microbes that are constantly adapting, constantly attacking,

and constantly finding ways to mutate into stronger organisms.”

Leavitt and other presenters at the four-hour summit referenced pandemics of previous generations. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were three pandemics: the “Hong Kong Flu” of 1968;

A pandemic refers to a strain of influenza that has spread around the world to many people. There were three worldwide influenza pandemics in the last century; each was unique and hard to predict.





*“Building preparedness capacity is a long-term enterprise; it is a journey, not a destination.” — IDPH Director Dr. Mary Mincer Hansen.*

the “Asian Flu” of 1957; and the “Spanish Flu” of 1918. “What is different (should a pandemic strike during our lifetime) is that we may be the first generation to be able to do something about it,” Leavitt stated.

The thing to do is prepare.

“We are taking this issue very seriously and are proactively reaching out to every level of government, as well as the private sector to prepare for a pandemic,” Governor Vilsack said. “Today’s summit is an example of the much needed collaboration between local, state and federal partners.”

Summit attendees came from all corners of Iowa. Included were representatives from agriculture, business and industry, communications, education, emergency management, faith-based organizations, state and local governments,

health care, labor,

public safety, public health and policymaking bodies.

“Any community that fails to prepare with the expectation that the federal government can come to the rescue in their moment of need would be tragically wrong,” Leavitt emphasized. The resources simply aren’t there. Scientists are concerned that

the H5N1 “bird flu” virus, which was first identified in Hong Kong in 1997, could mutate into a form that could cause a pandemic. As of February 8, human cases of this virus have been reported in Southeast Asia, Iraq and parts of Europe,

*“I am very supportive of DHHS for taking the lead on education and integrating state and local efforts. We need to do more community outreach to inform citizens that a pandemic is a possibility and educate them on existing plans and procedures that are undertaken.”*

*William Lawson, Regional Director of Business Executives for National Security*

according to the CDC. They have been caused primarily by direct contact with birds, mainly chickens.

Commenting on the implications of the H5N1 virus mutating into a form that could be efficiently transmitted human-to-human, CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding said the world hopes that never happens. “But

hope is not a strategy,” she asserted. “And that is exactly why we are here today, because we are looking at a scenario that reminds us how important pandemic preparedness is and we’d better get busy.”

Leavitt noted that getting busy now will not only allow Iowa and the U.S. to respond to pandemic influenza, but it will also make us better prepared to respond to a variety of future emergencies. “Preparation is a continuum,” he said. “We are better prepared today than yesterday, and will be better prepared tomorrow than we are today. That’s our challenge: to assure that the continuum of improvement continues every day. And if we do, we will not only have met our obligation as public servants and as leaders in the community, but America will be a safer and healthier place.”

### **Preparations ongoing at state and local level**

In a natural disaster like Hurricane Katrina, the affected area is more or less contained, Leavitt pointed out. A pandemic affects the entire world, he said “limiting the ability to transport medical products, food and other services — putting pressure on communities to have a





plan in place to help themselves. In order to manage it properly, local communities have to be prepared.”

Dr. Mary Mincer Hansen, director of the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH), noted that since Sept. 11, 2001, Iowa communities have made great strides in their efforts to respond to public health emergencies; yet much work remains to be done.

A key component to Iowa’s ongoing efforts has been partnerships. “We have made significant progress in our preparedness efforts and have improved our public health and hospital response capacity,” said Dr. Hansen. “Preparedness activities have fostered

valuable relationships at the local and state level among all response partners.”

Dr. Hansen mentioned some of the recent accomplishments that have increased Iowa’s ability to respond to a public health emergency. They include:

the Health Alert Network (HAN), a robust, redundant communication system which instantaneously distributes public health information to professionals statewide; enhanced disease surveillance; and the development of five volunteer Disaster Medical Assistance Teams across Iowa capable of responding to public health emergencies anywhere in the state during the first 24-72 hours of the incident.

“I think Iowa is in good hands. You have strong leadership in your government and you have a strong health department across your state and that makes it a very, very viable opportunity to take preparedness to the next level,” said Dr. Gerberding.

### Ensuring operations and services

James Caverly shared the concerns of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security about ensuring the maintenance of operations and services.



*“We must plan now for community sustainability and economic well-being.” — James Caverly, U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security.*

Caverly talked about two main components of planning: 1) health care planning for those who are sick and those who will keep systems working and cities functioning; and 2) business continuity planning.

As a “just-in-time society,” we need to consider a possible loss of workforce, Caverly said. “A snowstorm may last a few days. With a pandemic it could be weeks, and it will hit several places and resources at once.” There will be no way to predict social behavior, he added. For example, will employees stay home to care for their families, or go to work?

Other concerns Caverly highlighted included water systems, transportation, food supplies, demand for emergency services and law enforcement. “We must plan now for community sustainability and economic well-being,” he said.



*IDPH Acute Disease Prevention and Emergency Response Division Director Mary Jones moderated the summit.*



Caverly, like other speakers throughout the day, emphasized that doing this kind of planning now will produce significant cross-over benefits in formulating responses to a variety of emergencies.

### Iowa and federal government pledge cooperation

The federal government recently announced it would spend \$100 million to help states prepare for a pandemic. During the next year, Iowa will receive \$1.2 million of that funding.

Gov. Vilsack called on the federal government to recognize the importance of and provide a mechanism to fund regional collaborations, such as the Multi-state Partnership for Security in Agriculture. Iowa is the founding member of the 11-state partnership that coordinates animal health and food safety preparedness across member states.

To symbolize cooperation between Iowa and the federal government, the governor and secretary signed a resolution laying the groundwork for state and federal planning in case of an influenza pandemic.

## Summit highlights importance of personal preparedness

By Nicole Peckumn, IDPH Risk Communications Officer

Among the messages delivered by state and federal speakers during Iowa's Pandemic Influenza Planning and Response Summit, was the importance of personal preparedness. Should an emergency occur, individuals need to have basic supplies on hand and a plan for communicating with loved ones.

Since August 2005, IDPH has been encouraging and facilitating personal preparedness through its Protect Iowa Health campaign. Its message focuses on Iowans becoming "heroes" by preparing themselves and their loved ones for emergencies.

Nancy Sacquitne, the Winnebago County Public Health bio-emergency coordinator and nurse, commented on the effectiveness of the campaign thus

far. "Newspaper articles, letters to the editor, radio spots, and distributing Protect Iowa Health booklets at clinics and health fairs have helped facilitate understanding of the need to prepare for any emergency – whether it be an infectious disease outbreak, public health emergency, or a natural disaster," she said.

Resources are available at [www.protectionowahealth.org](http://www.protectionowahealth.org) and include local public health and hospital contact information, fact sheets about potential public health emergencies, frequently asked questions and the Protect Iowa Health print, radio and award-winning television advertisements. English and Spanish versions of the guidebook are also available to download.





# State experts highlight current planning

*Following presentations by the governor and federal officials, state experts outlined measures in Iowa to address a possible pandemic.*

## Public health's role in a pandemic

Iowa Department of Public Health Director Dr. Mary Mincer Hansen provided an overview of public health's role in this kind of health emergency. "Prior to a pandemic," she said, "local and state public health departments will function as an early warning system and be responsible for surveillance – detecting outbreaks of disease and identifying pandemic influenza strains."

Should pandemic influenza be identified, state and local public health will be responsible for implementing appropriate prevention and control measures. Public health laboratories will ensure proper collection, transport and testing of highly infectious influenza specimens.

"Our role will include providing timely, accurate and consistent information to the public and health care providers about appropriate prevention and con-



*Don Callaghan of IDPH was one of many state experts on hand to introduce summit attendees to emergency preparedness and response measures.*

trol measures," said Dr. Hansen. Measures in such a scenario would include vaccine prioritization, antiviral use, infection control and patient treatment. At the same time, continuing to operate and keep vital services available would be critical to reducing the impact of the pandemic on human health, the economy, government and the private sector.

Dr. Hansen expressed concern that the state and local public health system has been

under-funded for decades.

"There must be investment in the public health infrastructure, technology, medicines, and health care surge capacity that are necessary to save lives and reduce suffering from pandemic influenza and other public health threats and emergencies."

Another issue Dr. Hansen is concerned about is the lack of national baseline criteria for public health emergencies. She pointed out that currently there are multiple interpretations of 'preparedness.' Implementing standards will allow for more accurate evaluation of preparedness, and identification of gaps that may require funding.

Citing federal cuts to the public health bioterrorism program, Dr. Hansen called for ac-

This special edition of *FOCUS* represents the fifth in a series of articles about preparing for public health emergencies, such as pandemic influenza. Since November 2005, *FOCUS* has informed readers about Iowa's continuing preparations to respond to a pandemic, and discussed the nature of avian influenza.

Other articles pertain to hospital surge capacity and IDPH's Incident Command System. All are available at

[www.idph.state.ia.us/do/focus.asp](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/do/focus.asp).



tion. "The reinvestment of our country in public health must be sustained to ensure a healthy future for all."

Dr. Hansen concluded by saying that it is most important now to ensure that "all partners continue to coordinate preparedness plans and strategies."

### Detecting disease in birds a vital component

Among the many points Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Patty Judge asked attendees to remember was that highly pathogenic avian influenza is not active in Iowa or anywhere in the U.S. today. "Iowa meat and poultry products are safe and delicious," she quipped. "Please go and buy and eat them."

Avian influenza is a reportable disease in Iowa, and one of several animal diseases that must be reported by state law.

Secretary Judge emphasized the importance of addressing livestock diseases with human implications. "The first priority is to have a system of rapid detection for the disease," she said.

Her agency, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and

Land Stewardship (IDALS), is at the forefront of monitoring and testing for disease. Since 2003, Iowa has implemented avian influenza surveillance in several ways, including regularly monitoring and testing all commercial poultry flocks.

If highly pathogenic avian influenza were discovered, Judge said, it would be treated as a "foreign animal disease," triggering activation of the state



Secretary of Agriculture Patty Judge reported that her agency conducted more than 19,000 avian influenza surveillance tests in 2005.

worked with us to implement strict biosecurity measures," Judge said. Since concern surfaced about the H5N1 virus, efforts have doubled.

IDALS is involved in a number of other proactive activities

that aid in the surveillance of avian influenza. They include registering birds at swap meets, flea markets, and other exhibits which include birds; investigating game birds; disseminating bilingual educational materials; meeting regularly with poultry producers to discuss ongoing concerns and plans; and connecting veterinarians across the state via the Iowa Rapid Response Veterinary Information Network, the first system of its kind in the U.S.

*"I saw the commitment of the various levels of government, as well as the mix of people from so many different walks of life, all committed to preparing for the expected but unpredictable, not just avian flu. It's one big page, and we've all got to be on it."*

Jack Moseley, Jr., MD  
Meskwaki Clinic, Tama

emergency response plan. This plan, in conjunction with the Iowa Poultry Association and the Iowa Turkey Federation, would facilitate a coordinated and effective response.

The poultry industry has "stepped up to the plate and

#### Basic animal biosecurity principles include:

- Restricting access to flocks
- Strict cleaning and disinfecting measures
- Preventing personnel from carrying disease home from worksites
- Knowledge of the warning signs of the disease
- Reporting suspected disease





**Planning requires collaboration: a multi-sector approach**

Jami Haberl, executive director of the IDPH Center for Disaster Operations and Response, echoed a common message of the day: that all planning must be collaborative and multi-sector. "It must involve government, private companies, nonprofit organizations, and small and large businesses at all levels," she said.

IDPH has partnered with other state agencies to develop its Incident Command System to ensure a seamless process for inter-agency coordination during any type of response. Additionally, the roles and responsibilities of public health at the State Emergency Operations Center have been exam-



*IDPH Center for Disaster Operations and Response Executive Director  
Jami Haberl*

ined to ensure they coordinate with the national response plan.

Education and training meetings are being held with businesses, health care providers, hospitals, local public health agencies and others across Iowa. "Although we have made a lot of progress, there is much yet to do," Haberl stated.

**Continuity planning raises important questions**

According to Ken Brink, chief planner with the Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division of the Iowa Department of Public Defense, a pandemic would impact a broad range of people. So broad, in fact, he said, "The challenging question is to ask yourself, who is not affected?"

"Think about your role in your family or organization," Brink advised summit participants. "What happens if you can't fulfill your responsibilities? Is there a plan in place? Do you have a safeguard to keep systems running?"

Brink said that having a "continuity plan" will help answer these questions and others.

A continuity plan describes how an organization would deal with an emergency. It guards against disruptions and describes precautions designed to minimize the effects of a major incident.

A continuity plan also helps identify how an organization will be able to either maintain or quickly resume its essential functions or critical services.

Whether that organization is



*Ken Brink, chief planner with the Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division of the Iowa Department of Public Defense*

a company or a family unit, Brink said it is important to train people and practice the plan. "People need to know what their roles and responsibilities are," he said. "Exercise the plan to see that everyone knows what to do. Exercise the plan to make sure it works."

The state of Iowa has a continuity plan that prioritizes essential services. Plans are being developed by state agencies to enhance human resource elements.

Brink stressed that summit participants play an important role in communicating with people. "I emphasize that you, this room of leaders, have strong voices, and you have a lot of ears that turn your way," he said. "Share this information with others and engage them at home, at work and in the com-



munity in regard to preparedness and planning for a pandemic.”

**Legislators encourage planning and analysis**

Several state policymakers, including Rep. Linda Upmeyer and Sen. Amanda Ragan attended the summit. Both participated in the panel discussion.

“Today’s state and federal perspectives have been ,” said Rep. Upmeyer, chair of the House Human Resources Committee. “Everyone here needs to think locally about how we can go home and make this a conversation in our communities.

As an elected official and policymaker, I want to make sure we are prepared to protect the health of Iowans.”

Sen. Ragan, co-chair of the Senate Human Resources Committee, un-

derscored the fact that in a pandemic, local governments would bear the brunt of response efforts. Ragan encouraged everyone to be open and frank as they examine the weaknesses of their plans in order to improve them. “As we discovered from Hurricane Katrina, people thought they had plans that



*State Senator Amanda Ragan*

**Parting thoughts**

As the summit drew to a close, a panel of state officials had an opportunity to emphasize some important points.

“Iowa has a history of collaboration as we deal with emergencies

and disasters,” said Adjutant General Ron Dardis of the Iowa National Guard. “Planning for a possible pandemic has been no exception. We have it right when it comes to how we work together for the good of the citizens of the state.”

Secretary Judge reiterated that poultry in the state of Iowa are healthy. “Most birds in Iowa are being raised in confinement. It is unlikely that, in a confined system and with the biosecurity measures we have in place, there will be an origin of foreign animal disease. It is more likely that avian influenza would be spread by migratory birds.” Regardless, it is important to plan for any eventuality, she added.

*“The most important thing I learned today is that we are on the right track for any type of incident.”*

*Nancy Haren, Nurse Administrator, Grundy County Public Health*

were going to be effective,” Ragan said. “But there were serious flaws after the disaster struck. We must make sure that the flaws do not exist in our pandemic response planning.” She added that while there will always be uncertainties, examining them will be critical.



*State Representative Linda Upmeyer*







Levels hearing held by the U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee in Washington, D.C. earlier that week. “What that showed me is that we have interest at the federal level. They’re willing to listen to us.”

*Adjutant General Ron Dardis of the Iowa National Guard*

Commenting on the cascading effects that a pandemic would cause, Iowa’s Homeland Security and Emergency Management Administrator Dave Miller noted that resource coordination would be central to Iowa’s response. “Our natural response to disasters is to depend on mutual aid, to depend on helping one another,” he pointed out.

“But there may be no resources to depend on except those we bring to the game ourselves.” Miller urged attendees to consider this reality as they began their own planning.

“Part of the reason Iowa public health can be successful is that we have a partner like CDC who advocates for us at the federal level and gives us good information,” Dr. Hansen said. She also commented on her opportunity to give testimony earlier that week at the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness at the Federal, State, and Local

*“The summit was very educational and a valuable use of my time. The impact of a pandemic would be devastating to all sectors of society. We must plan and prepare to avoid the consequences.”*

*Stephen Richards, DO, President Iowa Medical Society*



*Left to right, IDPH Director Dr. Mary Mincer Hansen, Secretary of Agriculture Patty Judge, and Iowa’s Homeland Security and Emergency Management Administrator Dave Miller*



## Digital resources produced for summit, posted to Web site

All summit attendees were given a CD-ROM of resources to facilitate their planning efforts. Produced by IDPH, the disc included: news articles and sample plans for business operations continuity; information for businesses about pandemic influenza; checklists from DHHS; fact sheets and planning information from IDPH; resources for law enforcement; PowerPoint presentations; recommendations for health care and local public health; a pandemic scenario for discussion; and training materials. All of these resources are available at [www.idph.state.ia.us/pandemic/common/pdf/pandemic\\_summit\\_cdrom.pdf](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/pandemic/common/pdf/pandemic_summit_cdrom.pdf).

## Additional online resources

Avian Influenza Information  
[www.avianinfluenzainfo.org/](http://www.avianinfluenzainfo.org/)

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/)

Department of Health & Human Services  
[www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)  
Agricultural Research Services  
[www.ars.usda.gov/News](http://www.ars.usda.gov/News)

World Health Organization  
[www.who.int/csr/disease/influenza/pandemic/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/influenza/pandemic/en/)

Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship  
[www.agriculture.state.ia.us/avianInfluenza.htm](http://www.agriculture.state.ia.us/avianInfluenza.htm)

Iowa Department of Public Health  
[www.idph.state.ia.us/pandemic](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/pandemic)

Iowa Homeland Security & Emergency Management  
[www.iowahomelandsecurity.org](http://www.iowahomelandsecurity.org)

Protect Iowa Health  
[www.protectiowahealth.org](http://www.protectiowahealth.org)

---

### Iowa Department of Public Health

Lucas State Office Building  
321 E. 12th Street  
Des Moines, IA 50319-0075  
Phone: 515 281-5787

[www.idph.state.ia.us](http://www.idph.state.ia.us)

Please send your suggestions for future articles, comments on this issue and requests regarding our mailing list to *FOCUS* Editor Don McCormick at [dmccormi@idph.state.ia.us](mailto:dmccormi@idph.state.ia.us).

