

Public Information
**Colorado's Preparations for
a Pandemic Influenza Public Health Emergency**

Questions and Answers

What is Colorado's plan in the event of a pandemic influenza?

Colorado's Pandemic Influenza plan is available on the Web site of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/bt/HealthProviders/PandemicPlanDraft.pdf>. In general, the plan is in place to support regions, counties, municipalities or other areas of the state in the event of a pandemic influenza. The state has provided funding through federal grants to help local public health agencies prepare their communities. It often is said that all disasters and all emergencies are local. If a pandemic influenza reached the state, it first would be identified in as few as a single locality. The state is prepared to activate and mobilize its resources to assist in locations as needed. In addition, in the event of a statewide pandemic, the state also can call on federal resources for assistance.

Who is in charge in Colorado in the event of a pandemic?

The governor has the ultimate authority. A 2000 state statute called for creation of a 22-member advisory committee, the Governor's Expert Emergency Epidemic Response Committee, to advise the governor in the event of an emergency epidemic caused by bioterrorism, pandemic influenza or novel and highly fatal infectious agents or biological toxins. The committee already has developed a supplement to the Colorado State Emergency Operations Plan that was approved in 2001. The committee's priorities include the following:

- protecting human life (highest priority)
- controlling the further spread of disease
- meeting the immediate emergency needs of people (specifically medical services, shelter, food, water and sanitation)
- restoring and continuing operations of facilities and services essential to the health, safety and welfare of people and the environment
- preserving evidence for law enforcement investigations and prosecutions

This committee of health and medical experts would be convened rapidly in the event of a disaster emergency, assess all available information and make recommendations to the governor.

Other than allocating state resources, what else can the Colorado governor do in the event of a pandemic?

The governor has the broad powers to meet an emergency. See C.R.S. § 24-32-2104(7). In any disaster, the governor may “suspend the provisions of any regulatory statute prescribing the procedures for conduct of state business or the orders, rules, or regulations of any state agency, if strict compliance with provisions of any statute, order, rule, or regulation would in any way prevent, hinder, or delay necessary action in coping with the emergency.”

The following executive orders have been drafted for the governor to use in a public health emergency. These orders are not in effect now; they would have to be signed by the governor at the time of the emergency.

Executive Order 0.0 - Declaring of a state of disaster emergency

Executive Order 1.0 - Ordering hospitals to transfer or cease the admission of patients

Executive Order 2.0 - Concerning the procurement and taking of certain medicines and vaccines

Executive Order 3.0 - Concerning the suspension of certain statutes and regulations to provide for the rapid distribution of medication

Executive Order 4.0 - Concerning the suspension of the physician and nurse licensure statutes to respond to the current disaster emergency

Executive Order 5.0 - Concerning the suspension of certain licensure statutes to enable more Colorado licensed physician assistants and emergency medical technicians to assist in responding

Executive Order 6.0 - Concerning the isolation and quarantining of individuals and property

Executive Order 7.0 - Ordering facilities to transfer or receive patients with mental illness and suspending certain statutory provisions to respond to the current disaster emergency

Executive Order 8.0 - Concerning the suspension of certain statutes pertaining to presumptions of death and burial practices

What is Colorado’s approach to anti-viral medications such as Tamiflu?

There are more than 600,000 10-day treatments of Tamiflu reserved for Colorado through the Strategic National Stockpile. While the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment is supporting local public health agencies that want to purchase additional antivirals at the federal contract price, the department has decided not to purchase additional courses of Tamiflu through the federal government for the following reasons:

- Any Tamiflu purchased through the federal contract must be used only to treat influenza; it cannot be used to protect the uninfected from getting influenza. Perhaps most importantly, there is little evidence regarding the effectiveness of Tamiflu in treating a novel pandemic influenza such as H5N1.
- Any Tamiflu purchased through the federal contract that is not used by the drug’s expiration date must be discarded and cannot be rotated.

In light of the above, Colorado will be purchasing a smaller quantity of Tamiflu apart from the government contract, so that there will be flexibility in having some pre-positioned antiviral drug available. This pre-positioned supply can be maintained without expiring and can be used to support local decisions about the most effective use of the drug in response to a pandemic or other influenza-related event.

How will antivirals such as Tamiflu be used in Colorado?

First, as directed by the federal government, the 600,000 10-day treatments available to the state from the national stockpile will be used to treat the sick in the event of a pandemic. These courses cannot be used to protect others from a possibility or likelihood of contracting the virus.

Second, the Tamiflu purchased directly by the state can be used to protect those individuals most at risk of contracting the virus. In the event of a pandemic, Colorado will use its Tamiflu to help protect individuals, such as health care workers, emergency response personnel and others, who are most directly responsible for working with the already sick and who, therefore, are most at risk of contracting and spreading the virus.

What should an individual do to prepare?

Be healthy. Be ready. Be informed. These simple statements represent three things all Coloradans should do to prepare for any emergency.

- To be healthy, people should practice basic self-care: Get plenty of rest, exercise and eat a balanced diet. Cover your cough. Wash your hands. Stay home if you are sick. Avoid large crowds in the event of a pandemic.
- To be ready, people should prepare a home emergency kit with food, water, medicine and first aid supplies to last about a week.
- To be informed, people should tune to radio and TV broadcasts and, if possible, view Internet Web sites of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/> and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/> for all the latest developments.

How has Colorado used the federal funds received for emergency preparedness?

Colorado has received approximately \$16 million to fund public health emergency preparedness activities this year. The majority of that money has been distributed to local health agencies to lead and support planning at the local level. The remaining funds are being used by the state to provide the state level preparedness capacity that is needed with any response. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment also has received one-time federal funding of nearly \$5.2 million to further enhance pandemic planning and preparations. Of these funds, \$3.3 million has been awarded directly to local public health agencies

Where can I go for other information to help me, my community and my household prepare for a possible pandemic emergency?

Please visit the following Web sites for addition information, fact sheets and questions/answers:

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

<http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/bt/panflu.html>

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>

READYColorado

<http://www.readycolorado.com/>

How many patients could be accommodated by Colorado’s health care system? What is Colorado’s “surge capacity” in the event of a pandemic?

Colorado has more than 10,000 hospital beds. Of those, only about 10 percent are available at any one time. In addition to the beds already in place through the state’s many health care providers, the state has an additional 6,500 emergency medical beds in strategic locations around the state. The issue in Colorado is not available beds; rather it will be medical personnel to staff the beds.

What steps is Colorado taking to help increase the number of medical staff members available?

The state has contracted with the Disaster Medical Assistance Team of Colorado to manage a statewide Colorado Public Health and Medical Volunteer System database. Marketing/public information efforts are underway to help attract additional volunteers to register in the database. The primary purpose of the effort is to have a single database of qualified/trained medical volunteers who can be called upon in the event of medical necessity. The system also will allow nonmedical volunteers to sign up for logistical or administrative support assistance.

Who decides when to close schools?

Ultimately, the Chief Medical Officer at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment is charged with recommending to the Governor when to close schools at a statewide level. However, local public health agencies and local mayors/county commissioners have the authority to do the same in their jurisdictions.

Will Colorado have a hotline number for people to call for information?

Yes, the CoHELP line at 1-877-462-2911 . The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment will work with CoHELP staff to provide updated information about any large-scale, health-related emergency such as pandemic influenza.