

PREPARATION FOR PANDEMIC INFLUENZA IN COMMUNITIES OF FAITH

Pandemic influenza is a potential “crisis.” In Chinese, the two characters that create this word represent “danger” and “opportunity.” It is easy to see the dangers of a pandemic; it is much harder to see the possible positive outcomes. As people of faith, we are called to see all of life as an opportunity to serve and comfort our brothers and sisters, no matter what the circumstances are.

BACKGROUND

The reality is that in a “normal” flu season there are:

- 200,000 people who are hospitalized
- 36,000 people who will die from complications of the flu

Every year, the seasonal flu gives us the opportunity to prepare for the possibility of Pandemic Influenza. It is possible that these preparations will save lives during the “normal” flu season – and we will be prepared for the possibility of pandemic when it arrives.

TO GET STARTED

- ___ Gather a group – members of your Community of Faith to work together
- ___ Invite your faith leader to participate

THE OPPORTUNITY TO PREPARE

Personal Preparedness: What does your family need in order to be prepared?

- ___ Visit www.pandemicflu.gov for general suggestions for taking care of your family.
- ___ Visit www.providentliving.org for ideas about food storage.
- ___ Prepare to shelter in place for a period of 3 to 6 weeks
- ___ If schools close, prepare to provide educational and entertainment opportunities for your children

Preparedness for your House of Worship

- ___ Discussion about issues related to seasonal flu and pandemic flu
 - What can the Communities of Faith do to minimize the spread of illness?
 - Hand shaking
 - Other rituals of faith
 - How can you encourage people to stay home when they are sick?
 - How will you communicate this information?
 - Who are the people who are most vulnerable to flu?

- What plans do you have for helping these vulnerable individuals meet their needs?
- How will you provide spiritual care for persons who have the flu?
- How will you provide spiritual care for the families of those who have the flu?

— Invite a resource person to join your discussion

- Local Public Health Departments and Hospitals are looking for opportunities to provide education.
- Local Public Health Departments and Hospitals have materials regarding both seasonal flu and pandemic influenza that they will provide to you.
- Address rumors, misinformation, fear and anxiety by distributing accurate information and by being prepared.
- Make plans to communicate with people of cultures, languages and reading levels that are different than your own.

— Consider the impact of Pandemic

- Prepare for the possibility that public gatherings may be discouraged, including faith community gatherings
- In the event of a pandemic, it is estimated that possibly 40% of the workforce may be ill or not able to work:
 - Schools and day care centers may have to close
 - Hospitals probably will not have the capacity to care for everyone who is sick
 - Grocery stores may have limited supplies – generally only a 3 day supply at any given time
 - Water departments may not be operational
 - There are many possibilities – there is no absolute knowledge of what might happen
- Faith Communities need to encourage **personal preparedness** for their members **and** they need to **make plans** for their ministries.

— Practical Suggestions

- Post hand washing and cough etiquette signs in restrooms and kitchen areas
- Develop calling trees or e-mail lists to provide information and support to members
- Know who will be responsible for key functions and how decisions regarding these issues will be made and communicated
- Additional web resources for gathering factual information:

www.who.int

www.bioprep.org

www.cdc.gov

www.hhs.state.ne.us/pandemic/

THE OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE

- ___ Who has special needs (such as restricted mobility, need for service animal, substance abuse) in your Community of Faith or neighborhood?
- ___ Can you identify all the people who are homebound in your Faith Community and neighborhood? What are their special needs?
- ___ Are there people who may not understand information that is being distributed because they do not speak the language or because they cannot comprehend the information? How can you help in these situations?
- ___ How will your Faith Community help address the special needs that might arise for any of these individuals during either the “flu season” or during a pandemic influenza outbreak?
- ___ Is your Faith Community willing to become a supply center for those who are unable to stockpile personal supplies for themselves, primarily because they cannot afford to do so?
- ___ Is your Faith Community willing to provide for the food and/or other needs of those who lose their employment because of business losses that may happen during a pandemic?
- ___ Is your Faith Community willing to communicate accurate information to your members and the community? How will they do this?
- ___ Share what you are learning and your preparedness plans with other Faith Community and organizations in the community to serve as many needs as possible. You don’t have to do everything, but your Faith Community can be the hub of a network of resources for meeting needs.

THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMFORT

For the individual:

- ___ Intentional care of one’s spirit so that when called upon, you are centered in a way that allows you to care for others.
- ___ Know that you are only there to help; you do not need to assume any responsibility for what has happened.
- ___ You don’t have to have answers. Your role is to listen to the stories and the questions – and allow people the opportunity to figure out their own answers.

For the House of Worship:

- ___ How will we provide care for the families who have deaths? How will funerals be handled?
- ___ Hospitals may close to the public. How will the members of your Faith Community provide a spiritual presence to those who are hospitalized?
- ___ How can the Faith Community support care givers in the family? Is there any possibility for respite? Who will provide this care?
- ___ Plan for intentional communication with those who are ill or who experience death in their families: phone trees, card showers, e-mail lists.

- Plan to keep those who are home bound aware of what is happening so that their isolation does not create feelings of anxiety, fear or panic.

WHY DO WE THINK ABOUT THIS NOW?

The function of the brain

In the face of an overwhelming situation, the brain's primary responsibility is to ensure our survival. This means that the instinctual brain takes over, and we generally either fight or run away. In either case, instinct is in charge – but, if we have a plan, our rational brain can go to the plan and override our “fight or flight” reaction. So, we need to think ahead, because if and when a pandemic becomes a reality, we will not be able to plan well – probably not even think well. Thinking about these things now, when we can be very rational, will insure that we will take better care of ourselves, our families and our communities.

To save lives from the seasonal flu

Everything that we learn to do to prepare for a pandemic holds the possibility of saving someone's life by keeping them from getting the seasonal flu. Every practice that we use to save a life during this year's flu season means that we are better prepared to cope with pandemic influenza.

To provide accurate information which reduces anxiety is good spiritual care

Spiritual care comes in a variety of forms. Reducing anxiety by being prepared and by knowing the facts is one way to attend to spiritual health. When people's anxiety is reduced, they are better able to see signs of hope, know that their life has meaning and feel connected to one another and experience spiritual centeredness.

“Hope is faith holding out its hand in the dark.”

☞ George Iles

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