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October 18, 2005

MEMORANDUM

TO: Cities & Towns
Public Safety Agencies
School Districts
Port of Tacoma
Hospitals

FROM: Steve Bailey, Director
[Pierce County Emergency Management]

SUBJ: Pandemic Flu/Avian Flu

I'm sure most of you have been following the discussion of a possible outbreak of Avian Flu which could possibly reach Pandemic levels here in the United States.

While not a certainty at this time, I believe we are at a point where it is prudent to provide some general guidance on planning for your consideration. I also want to make you aware of some of the policy issues that we, as a County are proposing to take if we see any information that this threat is at our door.

I have enclosed a fact sheet regarding pandemic flu. As it explains, the next step that greatly elevates the avian flu threat is a mutation of the virus that would allow it to be transmitted from human to human, creating a pandemic. At this moment scientists do not believe that has happened, but there are certainly some indications that development may be close at hand. If and when that occurs the opportunity for a pandemic outbreak will be upon us.

Given that we will not have any immunization capability and the supply of a possible treatment medications are very limited, the only real way to limit the impact and spread of the disease is to significantly restrict "social interaction" within the general population. That means exactly what it says, we will have to strongly look at a major shutdown of our communities at every level. Again, this is the only preventative option we have at this time.

You also need to remember that we should expect to see replication of the flu among your essential employees at least at the same level that the illness is affecting the general population. This means that you potentially will be dealing with a serious emergency in your community with less than normal emergency staffing.

Pierce County Executive John Ladenburg has been briefed on this situation and has directed that the following be undertaken immediately:

- Under State law, (RCW 38.52) a “Declaration of an Emergency” provides broad authority for the Executive and the County’s Emergency Management Director to act to provide for the safety of all Pierce County residents. We are preparing the Declaration now so that we can move quickly if necessary. Cities, as Municipal Corporations under State law, should take similar steps at this time.
- All Cities and Agencies need to have Continuity of Government (COG), and Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plans in place to ensure that essential government activities can move forward even if key individuals are unavailable. It is particularly important to identify clear lines of succession.
- Essential functions and personnel need to be pre-identified and trained to understand their role in an emergency. Consideration for the care of their families may be important to address so that these individuals are comfortable remaining on duty.
- Consideration for the procurement of safety equipment such as surgical masks, disposable gloves and hand sanitizers for staff should be done now. Quantities need to be in place for extended operational periods.
- Emergency Medical Services and hospital personnel need to observe all recommended personal protective and safety precautions at all times.

We will attempt to keep you as well informed as possible during this uncertain time. Our website will have up to date information beginning next week. Please visit www.piercecountywa.org and click on the emergency preparedness link on the right side of the page.

Please feel free to contact us at (253) 798-6595 if you have any questions.