

Preparing for Natural and Intentional Disasters

Health Care Surge Capacity Needs for California

Following through on the Governor's January commitment, the May Revision includes \$400 million to implement a broad strategy to ensure that California is ready for public health emergencies and is properly equipped to handle them. This funding will enable the state to increase patient care capacity (also known as "surge capacity") to achieve the levels recommended by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). In the past, California has responded to "moderate" local or regional public health emergencies, such as a fire, flood, explosion or earthquake, with up to 10,000 casualties over a limited time frame. Measured against federal HRSA benchmarks, California needs to increase response capacity in some areas.

Emergency planning experts agree that the most critical element in preparing for surge needs is the development of hospital and community surge plans, and the training and recurring exercise of those plans. Given that the development of surge plans is a fundamental element in the protection of residents of California, it is appropriate that the State provide leadership and assistance in ensuring that these plans and subsequent exercises and training are completed. The May Revision includes nearly \$14.5 million to resource positions in hospitals throughout the state, dedicated to surge capacity planning, training and exercises. The May Revision provides \$4.0 million for the rapid development of state guidance on the specific licensing flexibility, liability protection, and reimbursement that will be provided to health facilities, licensed professionals and volunteers during an emergency response effort. State leadership on these issues will enable local health departments and hospitals to

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expeditiously move forward with planning efforts and ongoing exercises, which will ensure that emergency response assets are effectively utilized when needed most. Additionally, the Department of Health Services (DHS) will update hospital licensing and infection control regulations to address preparedness for emergencies.

In addition to ensuring that California's public health infrastructure is prepared for moderate events, the Administration is taking seriously the potential for a pandemic influenza outbreak. Pandemic influenzas, although infrequent, are serious public health threats. Currently, significant national and international attention is being paid to the possibility that the H5N1 strain of the avian influenza virus will mutate into an easily transmissible human influenza and cause wide-scale societal disruption. While we cannot predict with certainty that any particular strain of avian influenza will become a human influenza, medical and scientific information indicates that California must prepare for this eventuality. Additionally, the same planning and inventory of emergency response assets that is necessary to prepare for a pandemic influenza can be applied to future catastrophic emergency events that will certainly occur.

The ability of the health care system to "surge" to meet the demands of responding to an emergency event also depends on the availability of beds, supplies and equipment, and staff. The May Revision includes funding for the purchase of the following:

- Two mobile field hospitals to increase patient care capacity by 400 beds in times of emergency, as well as the infrastructure necessary for their rapid deployment.
- 3.7 million courses of antiviral medicines, at a discounted price made possible by an offer of 25 percent federal matching funds.
- 7,183 ventilators, which will double the number of ventilators now available in the state. These machines are durable, can operate on battery power and without compressed oxygen, and will be disseminated based on local needs.
- Supplies and equipment for alternate care sites to increase the number of general medical-surgical and intensive care beds available around the state.

Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Grant

DHS was awarded \$6.7 million in one-time supplemental federal funding from the federal CDC to prepare for and respond to a pandemic influenza. These supplemental federal funds

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are available only until August 31, 2006. Federal funds in 2006-07 will be used for the following major purposes:

- \$4.5 million for local health departments to support activities related to the prevention of a pandemic influenza outbreak.
- \$806,000 to strengthen DHS' pandemic influenza planning efforts, conduct epidemiologic investigations of influenza and respiratory disease outbreaks and provide epidemiologic and statistical support to infectious disease laboratories. These funds will also be used by DHS to train existing frontline public health field investigators to more effectively respond to anticipated infectious disease events and to support outreach activities, a general emergency preparedness hotline and risk communications staffing.
- \$360,000 to conduct exercises of pandemic influenza response plans and procedures, collaborate with local health departments, tribal entities, military installations, health care entities, and Metropolitan Medical Response System entities, and expand the hardware capacity of the California Health Alert Network system. These activities are required pursuant to the terms of this federal grant.
- \$200,000 to support cross-jurisdictional coordination in public health emergency preparedness with other states, military installations, tribal entities and Mexico.

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