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March 1, 2007

Dear Colleagues:

Subject: AMA-CDC National Congress: Local health department and community pandemic influenza preparedness planning experiences

On November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2006 the Cuyahoga County Board of Health (CCBH) collaborated with the Orange City School District, the Cleveland Department of Public Health (CDPH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Case Western Reserve University (CWRU), and the Cleveland Clinic to present "Preparing for Pandemic Flu". Other valuable community partners that participated in this exercise included: the Hunting Valley Police Department, the Moreland Hills Police Department, the Orange Police Department, the Pepper Pike Police Department, the Woodmere Police Department, the Orange Fire Department, the Pepper Pike Fire Department, the Woodmere Fire Department, the Chagrin Falls Fire Department, Orange City School Administration, Orange teachers, Citizen Emergency Response Teams, the Red Cross, and local hospitals. This seminar was initiated by the Orange City Schools in an effort to begin the planning process within its community. The day consisted of presentations from several experts followed by a table top exercise for approximately 300 staff, community emergency response teams, and local police and fire departments. This was one of the first attempts of its kind to actively engage a school district staff on the topics of disease mitigation within the school, educational continuity during an extended closure, and returning to work and school following a pandemic influenza.

Category:

This experience fits best into the area of "community mitigation strategies" because it involved discussions on the prevention and control of influenza infection among various agencies and groups.

Community Description:

The Orange Schools are located on a 176-acre wooded campus in the Chagrin Valley of Eastern Cuyahoga County. Moreland Hills Elementary School teaches children in grades preK-5. Ballard Brady Middle School serves students in grades 6-8 and Orange High School serves students in grades 9-12. Along with the villages of Pepper Pike and Moreland Hills, the District's 2300 students are from Orange Village, Hunting Valley and Woodmere, as well as portions of Solon,

Warrensville Heights and Bedford Heights. The Orange Community Education and Recreation department also is under the auspices of the Orange Schools Board of Education.

Public health services in Ohio are provided by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and 146 local boards of health that operate independently from the state health department. The Cuyahoga County District Board of Health is the largest of the local health departments in Ohio serving 56 communities with a population of over 800,000 people. CCBH's Coordinated Public Health services impact over 180,000 children in more than 330 schools. Three other health departments also operate within this county: Cleveland Department of Public Health, Lakewood City Health Department, and Shaker Heights Health Department. There are sixteen hospitals, one adult level 1 trauma center, two pediatric trauma centers, and one burn center within Cuyahoga County.

Planning process:

The planning process began with the conference itself. The morning education sessions brought the audience up to date and did a great deal to eliminate misconceptions and myths surrounding pandemic influenza. The audience members heard experts talk about seasonal influenza virus, avian influenza, the flu's modes of transmission, and the history of influenza pandemics. Information on historical pandemics seemed especially important in removing audience doubt about a possible world wide flu epidemic in the future.

The modified table top exercise involved an influenza scenario based around possible events. The scenario began with the annual Boy Scout Jamboree which attracts members from all over the world. In this case several international boy scouts unknowingly carry the virus into the United States and spread it at the jamboree. The infection then escalated in this country into a large scale epidemic with thousands of reported cases. The table top exercise was broken into three parts and participants were asked to form small groups and answer the questions below after each part of the scenario.

Question 1. What recommendations would you have for preventing influenza within the Orange School District?

Question 2. In the event of extended school closures, what are some of the ways that the school district could provide educational continuity?

Question 3. What ideas do you have for effectively bringing children back into the learning environment following a pandemic event?

Narrative:

The objective of the training was to provide the Emergency Preparedness Partners and a cross-categorical staff from each building the opportunity to evaluate community, school, and personal plans to better understand the procedures and the different Incident Command Teams decision-making processes in the response to a pandemic flu outbreak.

The use of a table top exercise with participants from a school setting proved invaluable. As is often true in preparedness planning, employees are provided with information and then leave the meeting hoping that the planning activities will continue without further input. In this case, participants were educated on the threat of a pandemic influenza event and were also taken through a two and one half hour modified table top exercise in an effort to capture their thoughts and strategies on issues surrounding pandemic influenza. In the days following the conference, the school district placed “plus/delta” sheets throughout the buildings to encourage staff to point out both positives (+) and needed changes (Δ). The following list of issues related to planning was identified through the table top exercise and the subsequent use of the plus/delta sheets:

### Positives

\*Many of the school staff felt that a strong communication system was in place in the district.

\*Staff related that they were pleased that the administration regularly provided training and ran emergency drills such as lock downs, and bus re-routing.

\*A Highway Advisory Radio system (HAR) is shared between the school district and local police and fire departments.

### Needed Changes

\*Some staff felt uncertain about relying on the local media stations to provide accurate information in the event of a pandemic influenza emergency. Therefore, the Orange City Schools are looking into mass phone call systems and the internet as ways to share accurate information quickly.

\*Some employees requested more information on items that they should have in their own homes during an emergency.

\*Requests were made to provide hand sanitizers and disinfecting wipes in classroom and common areas throughout the district. In response, the school district is actively looking into purchasing these types of products.

\*Some teachers felt that the district was not capable of carrying on with educational continuity in the event of a long term school closure and requested that the district’s web site be upgraded to allow for greater outside access. In the months to come, the district will evaluate its internet service to determine if this type of access will be feasible.

To conclude, we believe that the Orange City Schools “Preparing for Pandemic Flu” training was an excellent way to prepare a school district and its community. Many problems still exist in regard to preparedness planning in and out of the school district. However, without conducting the necessary education and running exercises such as this little will be learned about the faults of a plan until it is needed in an actual emergency.

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