

# **Pandemic Preparedness**

## **University of Pittsburgh at Bradford**

**Adapted from University of Pittsburgh plan**  
**Approved July 2009**

An epidemic is an outbreak of disease that affects a disproportionately large number of individuals within a population or community. A pandemic is a world-wide epidemic. Pandemics have been documented throughout recorded history, and in recent history, pandemics have occurred about every 30-50 years. Over the past several years, public health authorities have become increasingly concerned about an avian influenza virus that has infected more than 200 people in several countries, predominantly in the Middle East and in Southeast Asia. This viral strain is remotely similar to a virus associated with a previous influenza pandemic which killed millions of persons around the globe in 1918. Milder diseases also created pandemics in 1957 and 1968. An important note regarding the viral strain associated with the pandemic influenza of 1918 is that there was a higher mortality rate in healthy adults aged 18-34.

The current form of avian influenza is not effective in human-to-human transmission. However, a singular mutation of the virus could result in an easily transmissible disease with a virulent profile. International health authorities have been urging governments, institutions, and the general populace to begin planning for pandemic influenza. In March 2006, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention promulgated a Pandemic Preparedness Plan for the U.S. government, and a checklist to assist colleges and universities in developing plans to prepare for and respond to an influenza pandemic.

### **UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH AT BRADFORD RESPONSE**

In February 2007, the University of Pittsburgh issued a pandemic preparedness plan developed through the work of a multi-disciplinary team. While the regional campuses of the University are included in the plan, the Bradford campus felt the need for site-specific adaptations to that plan. This document merges the intent of the University of Pittsburgh plan with the considerations of the Bradford campus.

### **CONTEXT**

Although health officials claim that it is a matter of "when," not "if," a pandemic influenza re-emerges, the timing of the next influenza pandemic is unclear. The symptoms associated with future pandemic conditions remains unknown. How the disease will spread, the incubation period between viral exposure and symptom onset, and the efficiency rate for spread from human-to-human can not be precisely defined. This uncertainty led the University of Pittsburgh workgroup to develop a plan that could be applied to any communicable disease outbreak that is widespread and severely impacts the members of the University community.

Additionally, the Pandemic Preparedness Plan supplements the existing University of Pittsburgh at Bradford Emergency Response plan.

Discussions of the appropriate modifications to the University plan were guided by members of Pitt-Bradford's leadership:

- Student Preparedness: Dr. Jim Evans, Ms. Bonnie McMillen, Mr. Rhett Kennedy, Mr. Dan Howard
- Academic Considerations: Dr. Steve Hardin, Mr. James Baldwin, Ms. Christina Marrone, Mr. Bernie Picklo
- Administrative Operations and Functions: Mr. Rick Esch, Mr. Dan Songer, Mr. Pete Buchheit, Ms. Laurel Phillips, Mr. Bill Kline
- Communications: Ms. Pat Frantz Cercone, Ms. Kimberly Weinberg, Ms. Amy Ward

## **DEFINING LEVELS OF UNIVERSITY RESPONSE**

It is very difficult to identify triggers that dictate a set of responses and actions. As stated, there is a continuum of possibilities for the next pandemic. There likely will not be one isolated trigger that clearly necessitates increased response, especially at early stages of awareness regarding an emerging pathogen. Factors that will have forbearance on decisions to implement the response levels described below will include:

- government directives and/or travel advisories
- proximity of disease to University campuses
- severity of disease
- mortality rates
- public perceptions and response
- social order / social unrest
- time within academic calendar year
- positions and responses of peer institutions
- positions and responses of local institutions

Because triggers and criteria for decision making are dynamic and relevant to only a unique set of circumstances, the response levels are associated with a milestone activity. The resulting plan outlines departments, activities, and resources that are necessitated by milestone decisions. Milestone decisions are incrementally presented: A) the current planning phase; B) enhanced communication due to reports of effective human-to-human disease transmission elsewhere in the world; C) social distancing of students to reduce illness and disease transmission on campus; D) suspension of normal University operations due to pandemic conditions; E) plans for responding to ill individuals on campus.

## **RESPONSE LEVEL A - PLANNING LEVEL**

The University remains engaged in pandemic planning which has been triggered by circumstances and events that have prompted international experts to anticipate human-to-human

transmission of an emerging or re-emerging pathogen. This document provides tangible products representative of the University's response.

## **RESPONSE LEVEL B - HIGH ALERT**

This response level (B) is likely to be necessitated by confirmed reports of efficient and sustained human-to-human transmission of an emerging or re-emerging virulent pathogen anywhere in the world. It is fully expected that such reports will generate a flurry of media activity across the globe, which in turn will multiply external and internal queries about the disease and situation.

The Office of Communications and Marketing will use a variety of tactics to communicate during the high alert stage. For general information, the department will provide web linkages to the University of Pittsburgh's pandemic site. This page [www.pitt.edu/avianflu](http://www.pitt.edu/avianflu) also provides a wealth of links to government and expert panel websites, UPMC response information, travel advisories, frequently asked questions, and information for protecting family and loved ones. Although the page is currently titled "avian influenza", it can be easily modified for any pandemic (or epidemic) situation.

During this High Alert level, the University must be ready to respond to internal queries from its faculty, staff, and students and to external queries from concerned parents, visitors to the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, and the media. While the website will be central to this effort, a telephone hotline will be implemented. This hotline will include a pre-recorded message that will be updated as necessary to provide the most current information available.

During the High Alert level, communications will also be fortified using multi-media approaches. The information will remain consistent via centralization through the Office of Communications and Marketing. As necessary, print and voice communications will be targeted to specific audiences, (e.g. parents, students, staff, or faculty) to provide a more effective message.

During the High Alert level, the University will be mindful of members of the University community that are in foreign countries. A system is in place to identify students who are off campus for University-related functions (internships, study abroad, sponsored trips, clinical placements, etc.). The whereabouts of individuals performing University functions would be helpful in a pandemic scenario due to impending or enforced travel restrictions. Also it may be necessary to be aware that an individual's recent travel destinations have included areas where illness is prevalent, so that the individual may be appropriately screened or quarantined before returning to campus. In conjunction with the University of Pittsburgh, Pitt-Bradford is prepared to enact such screening as necessary.

## **RESPONSE LEVEL C - FULL ALERT (SOCIAL DISTANCING)**

This response level is associated with confirmed reports that there has been human-to-human transmission of an emerging or re-emerging pathogen anywhere in the vicinity of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford campus. The vicinity of campus is defined by an area that encompasses all locales that are within a typical daily commuting distance by automobile.

This response level is prompted by a scenario where emerging illness is spreading across the globe and the nation. There is non-stop media coverage and reported deaths in North America. There is a heightened fear among the regional population. The University is receiving numerous inquiries per day regarding the status of student whereabouts, classes, social events, research studies, and provision of other services. Assuming that a majority of social activities such as grade school, high school, sporting events, meetings, and other gatherings have been suspended, there will be increased pressure to disperse students from campus in order to reduce the spread of disease. (There may even be a government mandate for such an activity).

### *Social distancing*

Absent a government mandate, early decision making to enact "social distancing" at University campuses may be prudent to minimize demand for on-campus medical care of students, and for housing and support services for well students during this period of social stresses. In essence, social distancing for the University would encompass a temporary suspension of classroom activity. (This is not equivalent to a temporary suspension of all classes. Many classroom activities will continue via distance learning.) Additionally, students would be encouraged, advised or required to return to their homes to reduce the spread of illness.

It is recognized that there are legal, financial, and reputational risks in acting too early (and too late). Parents demanding to retrieve their students from campus will also apply additional factors for consideration. The duration of social distancing will be determined by the disease profile, external circumstances, and the timing of the decision relative to the academic calendar. In the event of a decision to enact social distancing, an organized dispersal of students from campus will be attempted using a multiple-day process that mirrors the current "arrival survival" process.

While planning a social distancing process, it became necessary to account for those students who may be incapable of returning to their homes due to travel restrictions, financial hardship, or other reasons. It is widely assumed that at least 80% of students could be dispersed to their own homes or to the homes of classmates. The Pandemic Preparedness Plan provides a framework for the University to maintain services to the 20% of students remaining on campus under a social distancing directive.

### *Absenteeism*

During this response level (C) in which social distancing is assumed and classroom activity is temporarily suspended, the faculty and staff are assumed to be available to work. Based on the social stressors that are anticipated during this scenario, absenteeism rates of 10-25% are projected. Human Resources is examining existing policies surrounding sick time, leave of absence, FMLA, and paid time off in response to these scenarios. Essential personnel have been identified and have explored the ramifications of an absenteeism rate of 10-25%.

Faculty and staff who indicate any of the symptoms associated with the pandemic disease profile will be instructed to immediately leave campus and to seek treatment through their health care provider. Information will also be communicated to faculty and staff that if they become sick, under no circumstances are they to report to campus. Employees should not return to work until at least 24 hours after being free of fever (100 degrees F) or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications. Any ill student on a University of Pittsburgh campus will prompt a response outlined in Level E.

During this response level (C), the University will be focused on the housing and feeding of remaining students, enhancing communication, maintaining campus security and computer networks, and sustaining the research enterprise.

### *Academic considerations*

Academic considerations prior to enacting a social distancing response will be critical in decision making. The academic considerations are highly dependent on existing academic policies, and the period of the academic calendar in which the social distancing decision arises. Timing for tuition refund, scheduling of classes and matriculation of new students (to name a few) will all be considered in the decision to enact social distancing. Given the complexity of these factors, the President of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford will consult with the Office of the Provost at the University of Pittsburgh to determine the course of action.

The academic hierarchy—Chancellor/Provost-SVCHS/Campus President/Deans/Division Chairs—will be the primary communication process for academic considerations during any emergency. Detailed contact lists for both telephone and email communications are in place and widely distributed. Existing communication chains utilizing all appropriate technologies will be utilized at each level to the extent possible during the period of the emergency to provide the most reliable and structured dissemination of information as to immediate actions.

### *Communications*

Per the existing Emergency Response Plan, the emergency command structure (Emergency Policy Group (EPG) and Emergency Operations Group (EOG)) will be assembled when an emergency scenario is declared by the Campus President. In the various pandemic scenarios, the Emergency Operations Group may extend beyond University officials to incorporate local, state, or federal officials responsible for coordination of activities, such as traffic control or emergency supply needs.

The University's home page will be used for institutional announcements, particularly to students and parents, as well as to the general public. Specific announcements directed to faculty, staff, and students will be developed and available to appropriate groups through email. The University's secure VPN/portal will be utilized to provide a reliable means of communication with faculty, staff, and students. Email will be utilized as appropriate to communicate directly with individuals and groups.

The University's communications will be maintained at the highest level of efficiency. It is critical that the University's computer and telephone networks remain fully staffed and operational to ensure secure and reliable communications. Staffing network and telephone operations will be given the highest priority; and ensuring the continued availability of key individuals will be critical. A listing of contact information for the EPG and EOG will continue to be kept current.

Given the necessary reliance on multiple means of communications, it is critical that one office have responsibility for ensuring that all communications are consistent and timely. The Office of Communications and Marketing will assume this role.

### *Suspension of classroom activity*

Classroom activity will be formally cancelled on a campus-wide basis when, in the judgment of the Chancellor/Provost/Campus President, acting upon the advice of competent authorities and pursuant to an agreed upon response level, class attendance would pose a risk of contagion or when a sufficient number of faculty and staff are not available to conduct classes or provide appropriate levels of support for students.

Individual faculty may not unilaterally cancel classes except under the types of conditions in which they now may do so, which is largely limited to short-term illness. Individual faculty may not change the method of instruction utilized for individual classes, such as substituting online instruction for classroom instruction, unless approved by their division chair and dean. The announcement of the cancellation of classes will be communicated centrally through the Pitt-Bradford Home Page, as well as via the telephone and email contact lists.

Activities located in other places, such as study abroad or distance education programs, should continue if possible. Certain classes over which the University may not have scheduling control, such as internships, may be cancelled unilaterally by the sponsoring agencies. In such instances, any credits associated with the experience are suspended until the activity can be resumed.

In the event of the cancellation of classroom activities, academic work in specific courses may or may not be suspended, dependent largely on the point the semester when the suspension of classroom activity occurs. Planning for alternative course delivery options is underway.

- If classes are cancelled after the twelfth week of the term, individual faculty may either award credit for the course on the basis of work already completed, or assign additional work to be completed independently and subsequently submitted, preferably electronically. If agreed to by individual students, faculty may assign an S grade rather than a letter grade.
- If classes are cancelled between the sixth and twelfth week of the term, faculty will, to the extent possible, utilize on line assignments, distance education or other arrangements during the period of the disruption to minimize the long-term effect on the class schedule. For students or faculty who do not have access to necessary computing capability,

alternative arrangements will be made for the completion of the work. For those courses in which the faculty are unable to provide online instruction, the classes will be suspended until normal activity can resume and students enrolled in those classes will receive a G grade. Students not able to participate in such instruction will receive a G grade, making up the academic work at an appropriate later time as specified in consultation with policy of the Provost's office and/or campus administration.

- Classes cancelled before the sixth week of the term will be repeated in their entirety once a regular schedule can be resumed.

The impact of the cancellation of classes on the academic calendar should be as minimal as possible, and every effort will be made to return to the normal calendar quickly. Subsequent academic terms should not be reduced in length; rather, the summer months should be used to provide the necessary flexibility in scheduling.

### *Faculty*

Faculty who become ill, or whose family become ill, or who are subject to quarantine and cannot conduct their assignments will be subject to the normal University policies as specified in the faculty and medical and family leave policies. Faculty who are able to do so will normally be expected to carry on to the greatest extent possible their academic responsibilities even if classes are cancelled, pursuant to the class cancellation policy described above. To the extent possible, faculty should utilize online or other appropriate distance forms of instruction and communication with students to ensure the continuation of appropriate academic work and to maintain the integrity of instruction and evaluation.

The University's network and applications such as Blackboard will be critical to this effort, as will the secure VPN/portal in terms of providing remote access to institutional resources. These resources will permit some level of academic work to continue during the period of the emergency, whether the students are home or are quarantined on campus. The extent to which this is possible will depend upon the severity and extent of the disruption and will be largely dependent upon the academic judgment of individual faculty.

### *Deans*

Deans of the individual schools are responsible for developing and implementing broad policies governing appropriate forms of faculty instruction during the period of any disruption. It is particularly important that units in which external accreditation is an issue have clear guidance from their accrediting agencies about the flexibility they have to implement alternative forms of instruction.

### *Staff*

Academic support staff essential to the continuation of programs of instruction and research will be identified and notified of their designation and responsibilities. Faculty and staff who fulfill these responsibilities should continue to receive their regular salaries during the period they are

doing so. Personnel actions, including leaves of absence for essential personnel, may be suspended during the period of the disruption.

### *Students*

Students will be given the greatest opportunity possible under the circumstances to continue their course work within the procedures described above. Should classes be cancelled prior to the sixth week of the term or should the personal health circumstances of individual students make it impossible for them to do so, University policies and procedures 09-05-08 and 09-05-03 will be applicable. Under this guidance, all charges for the term are removed and all registrations cancelled. Individual students may also, after the sixth week of classes, depending upon their personal circumstances and consistent with regular University policy, choose to request an incomplete (G grade) and make up the work at a later time.

Students who voluntarily withdraw from classes will receive tuition refund consistent with the existing schedule. Students who enroll at other institutions during the period in which classes are disrupted at the University may receive transfer credit subject to normal policies.

### *The quandary of essential personnel*

As stated, the anticipated absenteeism for this scenario is projected at 10-25%. For certain key functions or for smaller departments, this level of absenteeism may lead to the quandary posed by designating "essential personnel." The failure to report to duty based on documented illness or documentation regarding sick family members is managed through existing policies; but a failure to report to duty based on fear, or the perceived need to protect ones' family, future, or livelihood is being evaluated by Human Resources with respect to current employee policies.

## **RESPONSE LEVEL D - PANDEMIC PERIOD**

The response level (D) entitled Pandemic Period is self-evident and is associated with widespread, efficient and virulent disease that is entrenched throughout the region of Western Pennsylvania or the Southern Tier of New York. It is assumed that the healthcare delivery system is extremely over-taxed and most public services are minimized. There is widespread public distress and pervasive media coverage. In this scenario, social distancing as described in the previous response level is assumed, and for the sake of this plan the temporary suspension of normal University operations is also assumed.

University operations will be reduced to a minimal level necessary to maintain security, support students remaining on campus, sustain research models, and protect buildings. The performance of these functions will be impacted by the assumption that there will be a 40% absenteeism rate at any given time due to illness in the community. Additional absenteeism also is assumed due to illnesses encountered at home or fear of public travel. A 5% mortality rate is also assumed.

Pitt-Bradford will strive to sustain minimal operations for a period that coincides with a 6-12 week "wave" of high infection rates. Historically there have been waves of this duration occurring in multiple cycles, prior to permanent deflation of disease rates.

#### *Research continuity in a pandemic*

The University will seek clarification from its major funding agencies with regard to their plans for extension of grant funding and reporting requirements in the case of an unavoidable disruption of funded research programs. In the event of any unavoidable disruptions, the impact on the research program will be identified and addressed with the funding agency. Faculty conducting research or supervising student research are responsible for ensuring safe and appropriate discontinuation of research activities.

#### *Suspension of normal operations*

Another key consideration during a period of suspended normal operations will be the maintenance of University buildings. Such activities include provision of minimal heat to avoid rupture of plumbing in cold weather, providing minimally conditioned air to sustain computer systems, and providing clean and reliable sources of water and sanitary facilities to those areas where remaining students are housed or where personnel are maintaining operations for security forces, emergency response, decision-making, and other essential functions.

Maintaining a secure campus in such a scenario will become increasingly important as the University may be perceived as an area of refuge for those in distress. Further, capabilities of emergency response may be minimized and extra vigilance and monitoring of University facilities may be necessary to protect property and health.

Under the scenario described for the pandemic period, the University may be providing support for a number of students still housed on campus. Strong consideration will be given to consolidate those students into one facility to preserve resources. In order to further preserve and maintain resources for commodities, selected departments have initiated the exercise of validating that contracts with key vendors are in place and that an alternate source for the commodity has been identified (should the vendor also have a suspension of normal operations during the pandemic period).

The following items will be stored in the Health Services Office and in the Facilities Management Building to be utilized in an emergency; and will be inventoried and receive regular inspection by Health Services and Facilities Management Staff, respectively: masks, liquid barrier gloves, hand soap, paper towels, waterless hand cleaner, concentrated disinfectant, ready-to-use disinfectant spray, wiping cloths, buckets, and red trash bags.

### **RESPONSE LEVEL E: MANAGEMENT OF PANDEMIC CASES ON CAMPUS**

This response level is necessitated by a confirmed case of an emerging or re-emerging pathogen on the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford campus. It is feasible that a case of pandemic

influenza, or some other illness, would first emerge in Western Pennsylvania on a University of Pittsburgh campus. Such a finding would obviously negate the incremental approach to pandemic preparations described in this document.

It is possible that the first identified cases(s) in the region could be entered into the healthcare delivery system. However, since placement of a sick student in the healthcare delivery system may not be possible, plans must account for student transfer to the care of the guardian.

Upon case confirmation, the guardian of the student will be notified by the Office of the Dean of Students, and the goal will be to relocate the student to the care of the guardian. Every effort will be made to facilitate the transfer of the student to the care of a parent or guardian as expeditiously as possible. Sick students may be moved to the Bradford Regional Medical Center or another external location while they await transfer.

If the confirmed case is a University student that lives outside of a University of Pittsburgh at Bradford residence hall, the student will be referred to his or her primary care physician or the Bradford Regional Medical Center for management. If the case involves a visitor to the campus, the individual will be referred to the local healthcare network for treatment and management. If the case involves a faculty or staff member, the individual will be promptly directed to return to his or her residence and seek healthcare through the healthcare delivery system.

The Student Health Services has devised a series of plans and standard operating procedures for the management of pandemic cases on campus.

## **COMMUNICATION PLAN**

Throughout these various response levels, centralized and consistent communications will be necessary. The Office of Communications and Marketing has conducted planning in anticipation of these response levels.

## **OTHER PLANNING POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **Point of Distribution Site**

In January 2007 the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford agreed to become a Point of Dispensing (POD) site in accordance with the Strategic National Stockpile Plan. The POD is a site for mass distribution of medication and vaccines for the population of the greater Bradford area. Campus officials designated with decision making capacity regarding the POD include the Campus President, the Vice President of Business Affairs and the Director of Campus Police and Safety. Full information on the POD site is available in the agreement and plan dated January 3, 2007.