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Tribal Pandemic Response Training for Oneida Indian Nation
—CDP Public Affairs Office

In 1997, hundreds of citizens in Hong Kong were infected with Avian Flu. In 1999, another strain of the avian flu made Hong Kong headlines when two children were infected. Although the viruses didn't result in a pandemic, the ability to move from birds to humans created alarm. Experts fear that an influenza pandemic such as the avian flu could become global in the not so distant future.

According to the World Health Organization, the most severe influenza pandemic occurred in 1918, causing an estimated 40–50 million deaths world wide. Current epidemiological models project that a similar pandemic today could result in 2 to 7.4 million deaths globally.

Pandemic preparedness is gaining ground and is a major concern for health professionals across the nation. Recently, a team from the Center for Domestic Preparedness, located in Anniston, Ala., delivered a three-day pandemic awareness course to the Oneida Indian Nation on nation lands in Central New York.

The Oneida Indian Nation is currently establishing several emergency response protocols in writing and the Pandemic Influenza Planning and Preparedness (PIPP) course not only promoted pandemic awareness but also provided insight for other appropriate responses, regardless of the emergency.

“It's opened my eyes to my department's role during an emergency,” stated Capt. Joseph Smith, of the Oneida Indian Nation Police Department. “We have a small police force, and in the event of a pandemic or emergency we will assume other response roles, as well. Because we may not be on routine patrol, my officers need to know or have an awareness of the responsibilities of other unfamiliar responder missions. We're an integral part of the planning process and knowing our role in an emergency—pandemic or not—is important.”

Pandemic outbreaks will likely place a sizeable burden on operations, security, fire service, facilities and infrastructures—and critical health systems. The ability to identify, contain, and treat infected victims quickly determines how a community recovers.

According to Charmaine Frederick, Health and Human Services Director for the Oneida Indian Nation, the United States Indian Health Services has recommended all tribal sectors to create their own emergency preparedness plans, based on the impact of weather and other emergencies that have recently affected several regions of the U.S.

“This training contributes to our overall plan,” said Frederick. “Those who received the instruction this week know that you can't just call the health department or police department and expect them to do everything. It's much more multi-disciplinary than that. This is a major step forward in stimulating more discussion and developing concrete solutions and response procedures.”

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Tribal Pandemic Response Training (Continued)

The Oneida Nation is comprised of 1,000 tribal members and employs nearly 5,000 people. They estimate that there are about 12,000 visitors per day to their facilities, averaging more than four million visitors per year.

Terry Winslow, Oneida Indian Nation Fire Marshal, commented that there isn't a lot of pandemic education available. The Oneida tribal leadership is taking aggressive measures to protect the reservation, and is creating a team response.

“We all realize that there's a true threat, and that there are measures we need to put in place to prepare an effective pandemic response,” added Winslow. “The decision-makers are attending this course, and now that their awareness has been heightened, it's easier to gain cooperation when they need to be involved with a crisis plan.”

Mike Aguilar, CDP training specialist, commented that the PIPP course includes lectures regarding various aspects of influenza. And although the class focuses on pandemics, the training is relevant to all emergencies.

“This training is a great opportunity for the tribal sector,” asserted Aguilar. “The PIPP course is designed to train responders from multiple disciplines, and assist them with their strengths and weaknesses during an emergency. Many organizations discover flaws in some of the best response plans. The final exercise in the course encompasses training from the planning process and tests everyone's ability to respond during a fictitious pandemic influenza in a community. . You can see the stress level increase during the exercise and recognize that the responders are learning and are more prepared.”

“I was impressed with the training and found the experience to be beneficial to our Nation,” added Frederick. “With the difficult economic times impacting organizational priorities, the burden of not having to financially support this necessary and vital training for our key directors and managers was immeasurable. The presenters were intuitive to our unique tribal sovereignty needs and adjusted the training to accommodate those needs. That made the team exercises more practical and useful for our continued efforts in emergency planning.”

PIPP is offered in both residential and mobile training deliveries. The CDP training center features 39 courses designed for all emergency response disciplines. CDP training for state, local, and tribal responders is fully funded by FEMA, a component of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Round-trip air and ground transportation, lodging, and meals for resident and mobile training are provided at no cost to responders or their agency or jurisdiction.

Learn more about the Center for Domestic Preparedness training opportunities at <http://cdp.dhs.gov> or call 866-213-9553.