



Highlights of [GAO-09-334](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

GAO has conducted a body of work over the past several years to help the nation better prepare for, respond to, and recover from a possible influenza pandemic, which could result from a novel strain of influenza virus for which there is little resistance and which therefore is highly transmissible among humans. GAO's work has pointed out that while the previous administration had taken a number of actions to plan for a pandemic, including developing a national strategy and implementation plan, much more needs to be done. However, national priorities are shifting as a pandemic has yet to occur, and other national issues have become more immediate and pressing. Nevertheless, an influenza pandemic remains a real threat to our nation and the world.

For this report, GAO synthesized the results of 11 reports and two testimonies issued over the past 3 years using six key thematic areas: (1) leadership, authority, and coordination; (2) detecting threats and managing risks; (3) planning, training, and exercising; (4) capacity to respond and recover; (5) information sharing and communication; and (6) performance and accountability. GAO also updated the status of recommendations in these reports.

What GAO Recommends

This report does not make new recommendations. However, the report discusses the status of GAO's prior recommendations on the nation's planning and preparedness for a pandemic.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, [click on GAO-09-334](#). For more information, contact Bernice Steinhardt at (202) 512-6543 or steinhardt@gao.gov.

INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

Sustaining Focus on the Nation's Planning and Preparedness Efforts

What GAO Found

Leadership roles and responsibilities need to be clarified and tested, and coordination mechanisms could be better utilized. Shared leadership roles and responsibilities between the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Homeland Security (DHS) and other entities are evolving, and will require further testing and exercising before they are well understood. Although there are mechanisms in place to facilitate coordination between federal, state, and local governments and the private sector to prepare for an influenza pandemic, these could be more fully utilized.

Efforts are underway to improve the surveillance and detection of pandemic-related threats, but targeting assistance to countries at the greatest risk has been based on incomplete information. Steps have been taken to improve international disease surveillance and detection efforts. However, information gaps limit the capacity for comprehensive comparisons of risk levels by country.

Pandemic planning and exercising has occurred, but planning gaps remain. The United States and other countries, as well as states and localities, have developed influenza pandemic plans. Yet, additional planning needs still exist. For example, the national strategy and implementation plan omitted some key elements, and HHS found many major gaps in states' pandemic plans.

Further actions are needed to address the capacity to respond to and recover from an influenza pandemic. An outbreak will require additional capacity in many areas, including the procurement of additional patient treatment space and the acquisition and distribution of medical and other critical supplies, such as antivirals and vaccines for an influenza pandemic.

Federal agencies have provided considerable guidance and pandemic-related information, but could augment their efforts. Federal agencies, such as HHS and DHS, have shared information in a number of ways, such as through Web sites and guidance, but state and local governments and private sector representatives would welcome additional information on vaccine distribution and other topics.

Performance monitoring and accountability for pandemic preparedness needs strengthening. Although certain performance measures have been established in the National Pandemic Implementation Plan to prepare for an influenza pandemic, these measures are not always linked to results. Further, the plan does not contain information on the financial resources needed to implement it.

GAO has made 23 recommendations in its reports—13 of these have been implemented and 10 remain outstanding. Continued leadership focus on pandemic preparedness remains vital, as the threat has not diminished.