



Highlights of [GAO-09-909T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

As the current H1N1 outbreak underscores, an influenza pandemic remains a real threat to our nation. Over the past 3 years, GAO conducted a body of work, consisting of 12 reports and 4 testimonies, to help the nation better prepare for a possible pandemic. In February 2009, GAO synthesized the results of most of this work and, in June 2009, GAO issued an additional report on agency accountability for protecting the federal workforce in the event of a pandemic. GAO's work points out that while a number of actions have been taken to plan for a pandemic, including developing a national strategy and implementation plan, many gaps in pandemic planning and preparedness still remain.

This statement covers six 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.

## What GAO Recommends

This statement discusses the status of GAO's prior recommendations on the nation's planning and preparedness for a pandemic. Key open recommendations concern the need to exercise the shared federal leadership roles for a pandemic, address planning gaps at all levels of government and in the private sector, and monitor and report on agencies' plans to protect their workers.

View [GAO-09-909T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Bernice Steinhardt at (202) 512-6543 or [steinhardt@gao.gov](mailto:steinhardt@gao.gov).

# INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

## Gaps in Pandemic Planning and Preparedness Need to Be Addressed

### What GAO Found

- Leadership roles and responsibilities for an influenza pandemic need to be clarified, tested, and exercised, and existing coordination mechanisms, such as critical infrastructure coordinating councils, could be better utilized to address challenges in coordination between the federal, state, and local governments and the private sector in preparing for a pandemic.
- 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, particularly from developing countries.
- Pandemic planning and exercising has occurred at the federal, state, and local government levels, but important planning gaps remain at all levels of government. At the federal level, agency planning to maintain essential operations and services while protecting their employees in the event of a pandemic is uneven.
- Further actions are needed to address the capacity to respond to and recover from an influenza pandemic, which will require additional capacity in patient treatment space, and the acquisition and distribution of medical and other critical supplies, such as antivirals and vaccines.
- Federal agencies have provided considerable guidance and pandemic-related information to state and local governments, but could augment their efforts with additional information on school closures, state border closures, and other topics.
- Performance monitoring and accountability for pandemic preparedness needs strengthening. For example, the May 2006 *National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan* does not establish priorities among its 324 action items and does not provide information on the financial resources needed to implement them. Also, greater agency accountability is needed to protect federal workers in the event of a pandemic because there is no mechanism in place to monitor and report on agencies' progress in developing workforce pandemic plans.

The current H1N1 pandemic should serve as a powerful reminder that the threat of a pandemic influenza, which seemed to fade from public awareness in recent years, never really disappeared. While federal agencies have taken action on 13 of GAO's 24 recommendations, 11 of the recommendations that GAO has made over the past 3 years have not been fully implemented. With the possibility that the H1N1 virus could become more virulent this fall or winter, the administration and federal agencies should use this time to turn their attention to filling in the planning and preparedness gaps GAO's work has pointed out.