



Highlights of [GAO-08-539](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

The *Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza* states that in an influenza pandemic, the primary response will come from states and localities. To assist them with pandemic planning and exercising, Congress has provided \$600 million to states and certain localities. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) established five federal influenza pandemic regions to work with states to coordinate planning and response efforts.

GAO was asked to (1) describe how selected states and localities are planning for an influenza pandemic and who they involved, (2) describe the extent to which selected states and localities conducted exercises to test their influenza pandemic planning and incorporated lessons learned as a result, and (3) identify how the federal government can facilitate or help improve state and local efforts to plan and exercise for an influenza pandemic. GAO conducted site visits to five states and 10 localities.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretaries of Health and Human Services and Homeland Security, in coordination with other federal agencies, convene additional meetings of the states in the five federal influenza pandemic regions to help them address identified gaps in their planning. HHS generally concurred with the recommendation and DHS concurred.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-539](#). For more information, contact Bernice Steinhardt at (202) 512-6543 or [steinhardtb@gao.gov](mailto:steinhardtb@gao.gov).

# INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

## Federal Agencies Should Continue to Assist States to Address Gaps in Pandemic Planning

### What GAO Found

All of the five states and 10 localities reviewed by GAO had developed influenza pandemic plans. In fact, according to officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which administers the federal pandemic funds, all 50 states have developed an influenza pandemic plan, in accordance with federal pandemic funding requirements. At the time of GAO's site visits, officials from the selected states and localities reviewed said that they involved the federal government, other state and local agencies, tribal nations, and nonprofit and private sector organizations in their influenza pandemic planning. Since GAO's site visits, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has provided feedback to the states, territories, and the District of Columbia (hereafter referred to as states) on whether their plans addressed 22 priority areas, such as policy process for school closure and communication. On average the department found that states' plans had "many major gaps" in 16 of the 22 priority areas. In March 2008, HHS, DHS, and other federal agencies issued guidance to states to help them update their pandemic plans, which are due by July 2008, in preparation for another HHS-led review.

According to CDC officials, all states and localities that received the federal pandemic funds have met the requirement to conduct an exercise to test their plans. Officials from all of the states and localities reviewed by GAO reported that they had incorporated lessons learned from influenza pandemic exercises into their influenza pandemic planning, such as buying additional medical equipment, providing training, and modifying influenza pandemic plans. For example, as a result of an exercise, officials at the Dallas County Department of Health and Human Services (Texas) reported that they developed an appendix to their influenza pandemic plan on school closures during a pandemic.

The federal government has provided influenza pandemic guidance on a variety of topics including an influenza pandemic planning checklist for states and localities and draft guidance on allocating an influenza pandemic vaccine. However, officials of the states and localities reviewed by GAO told GAO that they would welcome additional guidance from the federal government in a number of areas to help them to better plan and exercise for an influenza pandemic, in areas such as community containment (community-level interventions designed to reduce the transmission of a pandemic virus). Three of these areas were also identified as having "many major gaps" in states' plans nationally in the HHS-led review. In January 2008, HHS and DHS, in coordination with other federal agencies, hosted a series of meetings of states in the five federal influenza pandemic regions to discuss the draft guidance on updating their pandemic plans. Although a senior DHS official reported that there are no plans to conduct further workshops, additional regional meetings could provide a forum for state and federal officials to address gaps in states' planning identified by the HHS-led review and to maintain the momentum of states' pandemic preparedness through this next governmental transition.