



Highlights of [GAO-07-1257T](#), a testimony to the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and Technology, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

An influenza pandemic is a real and significant potential threat facing the United States and the world. Pandemics are unlike other emergencies because they are not a singular event nor discretely bounded in space and time.

This testimony addresses (1) federal leadership roles and responsibilities for preparing for and responding to a pandemic, (2) our assessment of the Strategy and Plan, and (3) opportunities to increase clarity of federal leadership roles and responsibilities and improve pandemic planning. GAO used its characteristics of an effective national strategy to assess the Strategy and Plan.

The issues discussed in the testimony are based primarily on the GAO report, *Influenza Pandemic: Further Efforts Are Needed to Ensure Clearer Federal Leadership Roles and an Effective National Strategy* ([GAO-07-781](#)). In this report, GAO recommended that (1) The Secretaries of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services develop rigorous testing, training, and exercises for pandemic influenza to ensure that federal leadership roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, understood and work effectively and (2) HSC set a time frame to update the Plan, involve key stakeholders, and more fully address the characteristics of an effective national strategy. The Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services concurred. The HSC did not comment.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-07-1257T](#). For more information, contact Bernice Steinhardt at (202) 512-6806 or [steinhardt@gao.gov](mailto:steinhardt@gao.gov).

## INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

### Opportunities Exist to Clarify Federal Leadership Roles and Improve Pandemic Planning

#### What GAO Found

The administration has taken an active approach to this potential disaster by, among other things, issuing a *National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza* (Strategy) in November 2005, and a *National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan* (Plan) in May 2006. However, much more needs to be done to ensure that the Strategy and Plan are viable and can be effectively implemented in the event of an influenza pandemic.

Key federal leadership roles and responsibilities for preparing for and responding to a pandemic continue to evolve and will require further clarification and testing before the relationships of the many leadership positions are well understood. Most of these leadership roles involve shared responsibilities and it is unclear how they will work in practice. Because initial actions may help limit the spread of an influenza virus, the effective exercise of shared leadership roles and responsibilities could have substantial consequences. However, only one national, multi-sector pandemic-related exercise has been held, and that was prior to issuance of the Plan.

The Strategy and Plan do not fully address the characteristics of an effective national strategy and contain gaps that could hinder the ability of key stakeholders to effectively execute their responsibilities. Specifically, some of the gaps include

- The Strategy and Plan do not address resources, investments, and risk management and consequently do not provide a picture of priorities or how adjustments might be made in view of limited resources.
- State and local jurisdictions were not directly involved in developing the Plan, even though they would be on the front lines in a pandemic.
- Relationships and priorities among action items are not always clear.
- Performance measures are focused on activities that are not always linked to results.
- The linkage of the Strategy and Plan with other key plans is unclear.
- The Plan does not contain a process for monitoring and reporting on progress.
- The Plan does not describe an overall framework for accountability and oversight and does not clarify how responsible officials would share leadership responsibilities.
- Procedures and time frames for updating and revising the Plan were not established.

These gaps can affect the usefulness of these planning documents for those with key roles to play. Also, the lack of mechanisms for future updates or progress assessments limit opportunities for congressional decision makers and the public to assess the extent of progress being made or to consider what areas or actions may need additional attention. Although the Homeland Security Council (HSC) publicly reported on the status of action items in December 2006 and July 2007, it is unclear when the next report will be issued or how much information will be released.