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AIRPORT SAFETY AND OPERATIONS DIVISION, AAS-300

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DATE: July 16, 2009   No. 09-12

TO: FAA Airport Certification Safety Inspectors

TOPIC: Airport Planning for Pandemic flu including H1N1 (Swine Flu) Update

Purpose: The World Health Organization's June 2009 declaration of the H1N1 pandemic highlights the need to encourage airport operators to update their pandemic flu plans and to encourage those that do not already have pandemic flu plans to develop such plans for their airport. These plans include business continuity and operational response plans for aircraft with potentially ill passengers onboard. The Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Health and Human Services (HHS) are leading planning efforts for entry and/or exit screening of international flights at the 19 airports with quarantine stations as part of the risk-based border screening program. Other airports may wish to develop similar plans with DHS/HHS guidance.

This Certalert provides updated information to that contained in Certalert 0909. Certalert 0909 is cancelled.

Background: Since 2005, the United States has been concerned about the potential for the H5N1 bird flu virus to mutate into a strain that could be easily transmitted from human to human. As this would be a new virus strain, individuals would not have any built up immunity, and the rapid spread could result in a pandemic. Planning assumptions from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicated that employers, including airports could expect up to 40% of employees to be absent during the few weeks at the peak of a severe pandemic wave because they were either sick, taking care of sick family, or practicing social distancing. Fewer employees would be expected to be absent before and after that peak. Community outbreaks could last from six to twelve weeks, depending on local mitigation actions, such as canceling large events, closing schools and daycare centers, etc.

Since 2005, many airports have developed pandemic flu Plans, but many of these focus on operational response to inbound aircraft carrying potentially ill passengers. However, it is also important for airports to plan for widespread, prolonged employee absenteeism as part of business continuity planning. This type of plan also addresses workplace protection, such as employee education, bathroom signs, reminders for cough and sneeze etiquette, installation of hand sanitizer dispensers, and potentially the use of personal protective equipment, as recommended by the CDC.

Discussion: The recent rise of the 2009 H1N1 pandemic virus was another reminder that an influenza virus could mutate at any time and possibly result in a pandemic. Further, although this virus currently results in mild symptoms for most people, it is expected to return in the fall and winter, possibly as a more serious health threat. We need to learn from this latest incident and remind airports to revisit their pandemic planning. For airports that do not currently have

pandemic flu business continuity and operational response plans, FAA Regional Airport Certification staff should continue to contact each certificated airport to encourage them to create and maintain a plan. All regions should provide AAS-300 monthly updates of airports with pandemic plans for incorporation into the dashboard.

An airport's pandemic flu plans should consider best practices and guidance that are available from the CDC, International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and airport associations. Guidance documents include, but are not limited to, the following:

U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), "Pandemic Influenza, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Guide for Critical Infrastructure and Key Resources"
http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/cikrpandemicinfluenzaguide.pdf

DHS, Aviation Annex to "Pandemic Influenza, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Guide for Critical Infrastructure and Key Resources"
http://www.dot.gov/pandemicflu/pdf/aviation.pdf

HHS, Business Continuity Planning Checklist
http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/workplaceplanning/businesschecklist.html

DOT, National Aviation Resource Manual for Quarantinable Diseases, December 2006
http://isddc.dot.gov/OLPFiles/OST/013334.pdf

White House Guidance for State Plans March 2008. Airports should focus on Appendix A.1 (sustain operations of state agencies) and A.6 (Sustain transportation systems).
http://www.pandemicflu.gov/news/guidance031108.pdf

Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for an Influenza Pandemic, February 2007
http://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3327pandemic.pdf

Airports Council International North America (ACI-NA) and ICAO have recently updated the attached document on airport preparedness guidelines for outbreaks of communicable disease.

Attachments:

      Airports preparedness guidelines for outbreaks of communicable disease (revised April 2009) and issued by ACI and ICAO (pdf file).

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