



For Immediate Release

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Cobb Public Health Plans for a Pandemic

Marietta, GA – Cobb Public Health met with its partners today, including county and municipal government officials, hospitals, local businesses, school systems and community organizations, to discuss plans for the threat of pandemic influenza. Meeting at Timber Ridge Conference Center in Mableton, the group of almost 100 community leaders focused on developing continuity plans and addressing the basic needs of Cobb County citizens.

“It was an important first step,” said Cobb Public Health Director, Alpha Fowler Bryan, M.D. “We need the support and understanding of all our partners if we want to face this challenge head on. “A pandemic will affect every aspect of our society – businesses, community organizations, schools, individuals and families.”

Unlike regular flu seasons, a pandemic outbreak of influenza would have extreme consequences on all facets of the community. Estimates indicate that approximately 40 percent of the workforce would be unable to work, schools might have to close temporarily, and hospitals would see a massive influx of patients. “With such a large percentage of workers unable to report to their jobs, basic services that we have come to rely on could be an issue,” said Cobb Public Health’s Center for Emergency Preparedness and Response Director, Pam Blackwell, RN.

Health officials say the avian flu virus is a matter of increasing concern. The virus has been found in both wild fowl and domestic poultry, and in over 30 countries according to the World Health Organization. Some health experts predict that the virus could be brought into North America this year by birds migrating from Asia through Alaska. Stepped-up surveillance of migrating birds by health and wildlife agencies is already underway.

After an overview of the latest news about pandemic influenza, participants were able to ask questions of local health professionals about the likelihood of an outbreak in Cobb County. “We can’t afford to wait for an outbreak,” Blackwell told the crowd. “Pandemic flu will happen sooner or later, but no one knows when, or even whether the pandemic will evolve from the current bird flu. However, there are steps we can take now to be prepared for whatever may happen.”

“The virus continues to change, making it impossible to predict what might happen at this time,” said Bryan. “Those changes could mean humans will have little or no immunity to the virus.”

In addition to planning for a community wide response, participants were encouraged to take individual action in fighting a possible pandemic.

- Wash your hands regularly, cough and sneeze into a tissue, and keep your hands away from your nose and mouth; and exercise caution following hand shakes.
- Improve your health. The healthier you are, the easier it is for your body to fight the flu. Quit smoking, improve your diet, exercise regularly and get regular medical checkups. **GET YOUR FLU SHOT EVERY YEAR!**
- Stay away from others as much as possible if you are sick.
- Stay informed about pandemic influenza and be prepared to respond.

“It is extremely important that local planning continue,” said Bryan. “We can’t stop at just being aware of the possibility. We must be prepared.”

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About Cobb & Douglas Public Health

Cobb & Douglas Public Health serve children, adolescents, and adults of Cobb and Douglas counties in metropolitan Atlanta with personal health services, a pharmacy, prevention and health promotion programs, epidemiological investigations and health assessment, environmental health inspections and investigations, and emergency preparedness planning and response for natural and man-made disasters including bioterrorism.

Website: <http://www.CobbAndDouglasPublicHealth.org>