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Delaware County Stands Prepared!
Full-scale SNS exercise on June 21-22 will strengthen
county's response to major public health emergencies

Delaware County is taking its emergency preparedness to a higher level with a full-scale Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) exercise that will be conducted June 21-22. This mass drill will involve many emergency preparedness stakeholders including Delaware County public health and emergency planners, all school districts in the county, the PA Department of Health and federal CDC, the Red Cross and other volunteer groups, hospitals and many businesses, colleges, universities, private schools, and community-based medical care and residential facilities.

While the behind-the-scenes logistics are complex and expansive, the bottom line for residents is that this full-scale drill further strengthens Delaware County's ability to respond to a major health crisis such as a terrorist attack, pandemic or anthrax exposure. The scenario for the June 21-22 drill is mass public exposure to aerosolized anthrax, a lethal bacterial disease. Early on June 21st, County Council will get the exercise notification of anthrax release over the county and the full-scale drill will begin.

Delaware County is one of the first counties in the state to conduct such a comprehensive exercise, involving simultaneous activation of all key elements of the SNS program including more than 20 operational sites, six major hospitals in the county, more than 300 staff and about 100 volunteers. Chester County is planning a similar exercise later in June. Chester and Delaware County will exchange observers for their two exercises to enhance each county's communication, coordination and collaboration.

"Delaware County is at the forefront when it comes to emergency preparedness and this full-scale, countywide exercise enables us to validate that we can activate and operate all segments of our plan at the same time," said County Council Chairman Jack Whelan. "Our residents can be confident that we have an excellent plan in place, and that we have tested it to be sure we are ready at a moment's notice to implement it.

"In the event of a bio-terrorist attack or a pandemic, the successful implementation of our SNS Plan can make the difference between life and death for our residents," Whelan said.

The June SNS exercise tests the county's ability to get life-saving medication to the county's 550,000 residents within as little as 48 hours in the event of a natural or manmade public health emergency.

The exercise will take place 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday, June 21, and 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Tuesday, June 22. There will be an After Action Review on Friday, June 25.

(More)

(SNS drill continued)

Full-scale Exercise June 21-22

The June full-scale exercise in Delaware County involves simultaneous activation of all aspects of the Plan, including the Operations Center at the Delaware County Intermediate Unit, the Local Logistical Node (LLN) which serves as our county SNS warehouse and bulk distribution point, our hospitals, our school based Points of Dispensing or PODs, and our community based dispensing points known as Push Sites.

For the June 21-22 exercise, one school district - Southeast Delco – will implement the entire POD process and conduct actual dispensing of simulated/training medication to a group of school and public volunteers. Their POD process will be complete with medical screening, security, logistics staff and volunteers to dispense medication.

Other school districts in the county will support the exercise in a variety of ways including accepting delivery of “Pod in a box” supplies that support set-up of their POD process at the school, delivery of shipments of training/simulated medications, conducting test alerts of their staff and volunteers, and supporting communications and other tests during the exercise. In addition to the Southeast Delco dispensing exercise this month, seven of our other school districts have conducted similar full dispensing exercises over the past three years.

“Our public schools are absolutely critical partners in our SNS program. All of our school districts have shown remarkable cooperation and collaboration on the SNS Plan,” Chairman Whelan said. “They have volunteered the use of their buildings and campuses and many of their faculty, staff, and local residents have volunteered their time and expertise to make this successful for our communities. All of our public health partners deserve enormous credit for making this an effective plan.”

Members of the public who are interested in volunteering to support the exercise or future SNS program activities should contact their local school district and/or should sign up as a volunteer through the Delco Alert system.

Strategic National Stockpile background

The SNS is a federally-managed program that provides medication and medical supplies to local regions in the event of a major public health emergency. In the event of such an emergency, residents would be directed to Points of Dispensing to receive medication in the form of a pill or injection (vaccine), depending on the type of health threat.

Although the SNS program is federally managed and is supported by Commonwealth agencies such as PA Department of Health and PA Emergency Management Agency, the local implementation...the actual distribution and dispensing of medications to the residents of Delaware County is entirely a local/county responsibility.

Since 2006, when Delaware County developed its SNS Plan, the planning team and the SNS program stakeholders have executed more than 15 training and exercises/drills which individually tested various components of the SNS plan. Most of these previous exercises were hosted by our local school districts. The 2010 Full-Scale exercise is different in that it tests the activation and operation of all elements of the plan simultaneously. All SNS exercises are planned and conducted according to guidelines from the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA), PA Department of Health, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Delaware County's SNS Plan was put into action in late 2009 in support of the H1N1 vaccine distribution and dispensing to children and people at high-risk of contracting H1N1. The vaccine program was smooth and successful as a result of diligent pre-planning and exercises.

In Delaware County, we have two types of PODs. The Open or Public PODs are located at public schools and they dispense medication to the public at-large. The Closed PODs or "Push Sites" are typically at congregate settings that have pre-registered with the county SNS program such as long-term care facilities, prisons, universities and nursing homes. These "Push Sites" serve only the residents and employees of that facility. In the event of a major public health emergency, pre-registered Push Site representatives go to the Local Logistics Node (LLN) to pick up their allocation of medication and return to their facility to dispense it.

In the event of an actual public health emergency, the public would be notified where to go, what to bring (medical information) and what to expect from the POD process. Due to security and traffic congestion concerns, the public would be encouraged to walk/bike to the PODs, but would not be allowed to drive their personal vehicles. They would however be allowed to drive to many Assembly Areas throughout the county. From the Assembly Areas, the public would ride busses to and from the PODs. The public would receive their information and instructions through the emergency alert broadcasting system, Delco Alert (sign up for alerts at <http://www.co.delaware.pa.us/delcoalert.html>), and through various media outlets.