

**Commissioner Howard's Talking Points**  
**July 13, 2009**  
**New Jersey Pandemic Influenza Summit**

Good morning and thank you all for coming here today. It's nice to see so many familiar faces from across the health and emergency preparedness spectrum.

Time is of the essence as New Jersey continues to plan for H1N1 Influenza and its possible re-emergence this fall. In fact, this summit is not a kickoff of our preparedness efforts but a continuance of our preparedness efforts.

I also want to thank all of you for your hard work during New Jersey's response in the spring. New Jersey has always been recognized as a leader in preparedness and our efforts showed during April and May and continue to this day—thanks in large part to the efforts of Dr. Cliff Lacy.

Your competence, dedication and tireless efforts were integral parts in our state's response and we will be counting on all of you to continue these efforts in the fall.

I would like to welcome this morning's guest speakers who will give their agencies perspective on H1N1 preparedness:

- Dr. Pascale Wortley from the CDC who we will see by video message
- Dr. Paul Etkind from NAACHO
- And Jim Blumenstock from ASTHO.

It's a homecoming of sorts for Jim, who worked with the Department for many years and helped New Jersey jumpstart our preparedness efforts following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and our state's anthrax response.

I also want to thank Dave Gruber and his staff for putting together a comprehensive summit that be held over five days this summer. A summit of this size usually takes many months to put together and they did it in a few weeks.

Last Thursday, I joined 500 state health and school officials at the National H1N1 Influenza Summit in Bethesda, Maryland. Education Commissioner Lucille Davy, State Police Lieutenant Colonel Jerome Hatfield and Deputy Director for Homeland Security and Preparedness Joe Picciano also represented New Jersey.

We learned some very important things that will inform our discussions today. President Obama said this is a time to promote vigilance and preparation, not panic.

Dr. Thomas Frieden, the former director of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene who now heads the federal Centers for Disease Control, said our goal is to reduce illness and death and minimize social disruption.

He said flu may be the most unpredictable of all infectious diseases and that while the U.S. experience so far has been similar or no worse than seasonal flu, only time will tell what the coming year will hold.

Unlike seasonal flu—which is the most serious for the elderly—H1N1 Influenza has had a disproportionate impact on several populations: School-age children, non-elderly adults with underlying conditions such as asthma, obesity and, pregnancy. We know that children have proven effective vectors. In fact, New York City had 50 outbreaks in schools and nationally more than 700 schools were affected for a total of half a million children.

Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said that there are four pillars essential to our response to H1N1: Surveillance, community mitigation, vaccination planning and communications.

She also pointed out that we have an advantage in terms of planning and coordinating our efforts because we know that H1N1 is coming, so it is important that we remain vigilant and do everything we can now to protect the health of our families, friends, neighbors and co-workers.

Working with our federal partners, we have to continue to monitor the severity of H1N1 Influenza during the fall season happening now in the Southern Hemisphere and we have to monitor any changes in volume and severity here at home as we head into our own fall flu season.

Community mitigation involves our key common sense messages—cover your nose and mouth when you cough, stay home from work and school if you are sick and don't get on an airplane if you have flu symptoms.

Vaccination planning is something that I know all of you are interested in. We heard during the federal summit that the hope is that a safe and effective vaccine will be ready by mid-October. Over the next two days and during the other days of the summit, I know that we will be exploring this subject in more depth.

H1N1 Influenza vaccine is expected to be a two-dose vaccine, which presents yet another challenge in both tracking individuals as well as the work it takes to administer the vaccine twice. In addition, we will be dealing with seasonal flu vaccine—the only advantage may be that seasonal flu vaccine will be distributed earlier than any H1N1 vaccine.

The priority populations for vaccination that were outlined by our federal partners, last week, based on the science of the outbreak, are staff and children attending school, non-elderly adults with underlying medical conditions such as asthma, morbid obesity and pregnancy, and health care workers.

Another resounding message was that clear and consistent communication is critical to our response. The public needs to understand why it's important to get vaccinated; why it is important to stay home when sick and why it is critical to practice preventive hygiene measures. These messages can never be repeated too many times. Because the situation will change rapidly, consistent communication will be especially important—and challenging.

At the summit, Secretary Sebelius asked us to return home and hold summits over the summer. I was pleased to tell federal officials and other state health officials in attendance that New Jersey has been planning this summit for sometime -- once again, showing that we are leading the nation when it comes to preparedness.

Other issues that were discussed on the national level are the same ones we are currently dealing with here in New Jersey.

The issue of school preparedness continues to be a focus nationally. The Department worked very closely with the Department of Education during the outbreak in the spring and will continue to do so in preparation for the fall.

On the same note, local schools need to be working closely with their local health partners as they strengthen their preparedness plans for the fall months.

Governor Corzine and I are thankful that the Obama administration understands the importance of assisting states in their efforts. We are grateful that in the next few weeks states will receive \$350 million in preparedness grants—and New Jersey will receive \$10 million of that.

The funds will go directly to health agencies and healthcare facilities to continue preparedness efforts. States are being asked to submit applications by July 23 and our dialogue over the next few days will inform and help us prioritize issues for the grant application.

Again, I thank all of you for being here today and continuing the important work of protecting the health and safety of New Jersey's residents.

Thank you.