

PUSH PARTNER MEETING FAQ's

2008



The Yolo County Health Department and Sacramento County Public Health hosted meetings with local businesses called “Pushing Out to Businesses in a Public Health Emergency: Dispensing Medications During an Emergency.” This presentation went over the steps to becoming a PUSH PARTNER and the advantages of businesses partnering with the health department to hand out preventative antibiotics to their employees and families in the event of a, large-scale public health emergency. The following questions and answers were discussed at the meeting.

Q: When would businesses be asked to dispense medications at our own facility?

A: The only time the Health Department would ask businesses to dispense medications to employees and their families without medical oversight would be in the very rare event that there is a great risk to the whole population and preventive medications need to be taken immediately. This also assumes that the whole region or state is affected and that is why we can not get enough licensed medical personnel to help us dispense medications quickly enough.

Q: Are the Health Department staff going to run the PUSH PARTNER clinic to dispense medications?

A: No. We will send one Health Department assignee to go to your site, bring all the medications, forms and protocols and provide a brief “Just-In-Time” training to the staff you identified to coordinate the dispensing clinic. The Health Department assignee will then have to leave and go on to bring medications and a brief training to all the other businesses, health clinics and disaster service worker agencies that are doing the same thing.

Q: Are we required to recruit medical staff to dispense medications to our employees?

A: No. During a declared public health emergency when a life-threatening event occurred and the whole county, region or state population need to receive prophylaxis (preventive) medications in a very brief period of time, the Governor is expected to waive dispensing regulations to allow non-medical staff to help dispense medications.

Q: Where do we refer employees if they have medical problems or medical questions about the medications we are handing out?

A: We will provide you with scripted questions and answers and procedures to follow (you will be educated on this process in more detail). Those who are “iffy” about whether or not they should take the medication will be given the life-saving medications to take home with them and told to consult with their own doctor.

Q: Will people be allowed to pick up packets for their family?

A: Yes. There is no limit to how many “packets” or doses of medication a person can collect.

Q: Are the medications in unit dosages?

A: Yes. You will be given the medications already packaged with clear instructions and precautions just like any other medication received at a local pharmacy.

Q: Do you provide any kind of injectables?

A: No. We would only call on our PUSH PARTNERS in an extremely widespread event where we have emergency medications available in the form of pills or tablets. Using the accompanying forms and instructions provided by the health department, your staff will be able to reasonably dispense the medications to other employees and their families.

Q: Could someone be turned down for medication during the dispensing process?

A: No. Each PUSH PARTNER would receive guidance about the medications developed by the Yolo County Health Department, Sacramento County Public Health, the California Department of Public Health and/or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Dispensing staff would provide pre-prepared written information about the reason for the emergency medications, benefits and possible side effects of taking the medication to all employees. Even in an emergency, each person can make the decision whether or not to take the medication. However, if the person could potentially contaminate or transmit the disease to someone else by not taking the preventive medications, they may need to separate themselves or quarantine themselves for a period of time.

Q: Are there multiple drugs in case I know that I am allergic to one of the medications being dispensed?

A: Yes. Depending on the situation (example: in the case of, an aerosolized anthrax release) we will provide more than one type of antibiotic

Q: If I have employees with Medical or nursing licenses who will help oversee the dispensing of emergency medication, how will they be protected from medical liability?

A: Currently, there is no blanket of protection established by the State of California for medically licensed personnel. In a declared emergency, the Governor can waive certain scopes of practice that would affect those with medical licenses which may allow for lay people to dispense medications without a license in a public health emergency where large populations would be placed at risk of death or serious illness if medications or vaccines are delayed. The law currently reads:

“Expanded powers are also granted to the Governor and/or other chief executives or governing bodies within California by the California Emergency Services Act [Cal. Gov. Code, §§ 8550-8668] and the California Disaster Assistance Act [Cal. Gov. Code, §§ 8680-8690.7], among others. Section 8571 of the Government Code, for instance, permits the Governor to suspend any regulatory statute during a state of war or emergency where strict compliance therewith would prevent, hinder, or delay mitigation.

Since we have not experienced this level of emergency, we will all have to rely on good faith and backing of the state legal system if this event should ever happen.

Q: What are the planning parameters for how large the release is and when the Health Department will provide prophylaxis (preventative medications) to everyone?

A: It will depend upon the situation at the time and the level of immediate risk to the population. Currently our planning efforts are based on a worst case scenario where we will need to dispense medications immediately to the entire county. We will follow the guidance of the CDC and the State Department of Public Health. However, the Yolo County Health Officer can declare a local emergency and make that decision for our county.

Q: What happens if someone overdoses on the medication because “if one is good more must be better”?

A: That is always a possibility when someone leaves a pharmacy or dispensing site with their medication. You will be given instructions on how much medication to take and when you should take them (this will be provided by the health department). It is up to the person to follow the directions.

Q: Does the County Public Health Department have a plan to include what to do if electricity and/or phones are out?

A: Yes. The All Hazards Plan for every county in the State covers electrical and telephone outages. It is clearly a challenge but the Health Department is also required to address these issues if life-threatening events should occur and we must respond to save lives.

Q: How much time is expected for training for PUSH PARTNER planning and time needed to set up a dispensing site at our facility?

A: A basic workshop takes about 2 hours for training. An additional 2-4 hours would be needed if you would like to do a functional drill. The amount and type of training is up to you and your organization.

Q: We are only open Monday through Friday, 8 am to 5 pm at our company. Are we expected to get medications to employees if something happens after hours even if many employees live out of town?

A: Our goal is get the medications to the public as quickly as possible. Our PUSH PARTNER model is primarily to provide emergency medications on-site during normal business hours. However, if an emergency of this scale were to happen after hours, you would have the option of opening your site or having staff and their families go to Public Dispensing Sites closest to their homes.

Q: What if there is a Quarantine where people are located?

A: It would be impossible to quarantine a whole county. The Health Department will focus on isolating small numbers of individuals who are ill with a life-threatening contagious illness and separating or quarantining their close contacts

for a limited period of time to ensure they don't become ill and contagious, too. If more than one person is ill in the facility with a life-threatening contagious illness for which there is no treatment or prophylaxis, then the facility might be quarantined for a limited period of time. In almost all cases, persons can be quarantined at home or at other more comfortable locations.

Q: How many different types of Biological Agents are being prepared for?

A: There are the 10 life-threatening biological agents identified for which we are required to have response plans in order to rapidly contain their spread. However, our public health emergency response system is scalable to adapt to other unknown agents or new emerging infections that may arise.

Q: Are the PUSH PARTNER Points of Dispensing only for employees or is the public allowed to come to those locations too?

A: This is an individual choice; each PUSH PARTNER chooses whether they want to open for the public or just focus on their employees and their families.

Q: If I decide to open my business to the public, how long am I obligated to be running for the public?

A: There is no time limit obligation for public use once a business decides to be a public PUSH PARTNER site. The decision to open to the public can be identified when you sign-up to be a PUSH PARTNER and will be an individual choice of the PUSH PARTNER company.

Q: If our company chooses to allow the public to come and get emergency medications at our location, how would we get all these additional medications?

A: Once you become a Push Partner you will be given a number and person to contact at the Yolo County Health Department or Sacramento County Public Health Department. In the event of a declared public health emergency, you would confirm that the amount of medication we have on file for your employees and family members is correct or adjust that number as needed. The health department would then deploy the supplies and medications you need for your employees and their families and additional medications as needed to help us provide medications to the public if you choose to do so.