



Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP)

Preparedness Funding in Minnesota

Responding to disasters and emergencies is a core responsibility of Minnesota's local public health departments. In Minnesota, PHEP funding goes to the state and is passed through to locals. Past proposals to redistribute PHEP funds along with funding cuts highlights the vulnerability of federal funding. This greatly compromises local public health's ability to respond to emergency events, whether from infectious disease outbreaks such as COVID-19, natural disasters or even terrorism. Since the program begun in 2002, Minnesota's PHEP funding has been cut drastically from nearly \$16 million in 2002 to \$9.2 million in 2019. Funding expectations have not been realigned to reflect the cuts, placing additional burden on local tax levies to fill the gaps.

Supporting local public health emergency response and preparatory activities with sufficient and dependable funding are critical to effectively respond to an outbreak or public health emergency. Listed below is an example of how local public health agencies currently invest resources to better prepare for and mitigate the risk associated with these life-threatening events. These activities are essential to prevent the loss of life and mitigate the harm associated communicable disease outbreaks and real-world emergencies.

Washington County – Preparedness Activities

Washington County Department Public Health and Environment (PHE) staff spent September and October participating in a joint St. Croix Valley hospital exercise with Lakeview Hospital to test and practice emergency response plans for a pandemic flu outbreak. The PHE Emergency Preparedness team and the PHE Disease Prevention and Control team met weekly via WebEx with Lakeview Hospital staff and the three HealthPartners hospitals in Wisconsin to discuss interagency cooperation during a simulated public health emergency. Over 220 staff reviewed pandemic flu plans and protocols and had in depth discussions about a real-world response. The month-long exercise culminated with a live flu clinic on October 7th at Lakeview Hospital in which PHE staff and Medical Reserve Corps volunteers from Washington County vaccinated over 436 hospital staff with the seasonal flu vaccine.

Minnesota Local Response to COVID-19

Anoka County

In Anoka County, the Disease Prevention & Control/Public Health Emergency Preparedness Supervisor have been participating in Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) conference calls since January 24, 2020. Information learned has been shared with the Director, PHN Manager and the Emergency Management Director to maintain situational awareness. Beginning the week of March 2, 2020, they will begin a "soft" Incident Command to conduct weekly Situational Awareness updates. Essential personnel invited to these updates include the Public Health Emergency Services Director, Public Health Nurse (PHN) Manager, Emergency Services Manager, Emergency Management Director, Communications Director, DPC/PHEP PHN Supervisor, a lead PHN, PHEP Community Planning & Outreach Specialist and PHEP Consultant. They have responded to several requests for information and crafted messaging that was sent to all Anoka County Employees, community partners including law enforcement, school nurses, and AC EMS Council. Anoka's website is being kept up to date. Costs incurred to date relates to staff time.

Carver County

Carver County Public Health activated a "light" version of their Incident Command System (ICS), and they have plans to open their County Emergency Operations Center later this week in collaboration with Emergency Management. They have been coordinating most of their activity closely with the Sheriff's Emergency Management team for the past several weeks regarding the COVID-19 outbreak. They are participating in the daily briefings from MDH, Minnesota Hospital Association and the CDC. They are

submitting Health Action Alerts as generated from MDH, as well as communicating with all critical and collaborative partners on a regular basis. They are posting updates for the public via social media and news releases, and communicating regularly with staff and county leadership.

The local health department has reviewed and updated relevant policies and procedures, and they are drafting their Essential Services response protocol. They have met with the Employee Relations Director and staff on updating county policies on sick protocols and Continuity Of Operations Plan (COOP). They also plan to meet with union representatives as part of this process. They have tried to replenish equipment and supplies but have run into some supply chain challenges. All their staff have been fit tested for facemasks or respirators. They have enough supplies for public health staff but are still short on surplus supplies for other employees and the public.

Horizon Public Health

Horizon Public Health serves approximately 67,000 people and covers Douglas, Grant, Pope, Stevens and Traverse Counties. Horizon has spent \$6,553 from late January through Feb. 28th on COVID-19 response. The local health department has primarily been doing outreach to partners, working with Emergency Managers and county officials, reaching out to schools, and working with the media. Horizon Public Health staff have been meeting with their medical consultant, going through plans, looking at their mobile work policy, and getting more staff fit tested. They have also re-examined their supplies and have connected with hospitals, clinics, and EMS partners.

Watonwan County

Watonwan County hosts open hours shot clinics. During those, they had multiple people ask about a vaccine for COVID-19 and had to provide direct education regarding the virus. After realizing this was not an isolated incident, they then posted on their Facebook page regarding the question and a link to the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) resources. An email was sent to local clinics making them aware of the post and questions received by the local health department.

The county's local health care coalition began hosting weekly phone calls with the region regarding current local updates/information regarding COVID-19. These calls keep everyone updated regarding what they are facing for barriers/questions/concerns of the community. The group also discussed how the hospitals are handling the influx of influenza cases and current supplies, such as masks. Other topics as also discussed as needed. The county has also completed an inventory per the CDC of the masks they have in stock. Currently staff time dedicated to updates/calls/emails for COVID19 is about 1-2 hours a week. Time spent for education with individuals varies, but approximately 30 minutes-1 hour a week.

Wright County

Wright County has five staff attending 3x a week calls and charging their time to PHEP. The county recently decided to move from PHEP funding for staff time to response. The county usually only charges 1 FTE to PHEP. That does not include the director's time, supervisor time, or the county communications director's time. By the close of business Friday, Wright County will have done the following for COVID-19 response:

- 3x weekly meetings with lead preparedness staff
- Reviewed staffing plan and surge capacity
- Developed a communication plan for staff, county leadership and the public

Wright County has seen a decrease in preparedness funding. As one of the fastest growing counties in the state, their funding is failing to keeping up with population growth and coordination needs. PHEP funding isn't available to cover staff time for emergency response. For example, the approximately 15 hours of staff time working on the environmental impacts to communities and schools effected by the fire in Becker were not covered.

About the Local Public Health Association of Minnesota



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

The Local Public Health Association of Minnesota (LPHA) is a voluntary, non-profit organization that works to achieve a strong local public health system through leadership and collective advocacy on behalf of Minnesota's county, city and tribal local public health departments. The Association represents more than 230 public health directors, supervisors and community health services administrators throughout the state. LPHA is an affiliate of the Association of Minnesota Counties.
