

**H1N1 Flu: Protecting Our Communities
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Field
Hearing**

Chairman Joe Lieberman

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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVER

Good morning to everyone and welcome to this field hearing of the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee at which we will examine Connecticut's preparedness for a fall resurgence of the H1N1 influenza virus.

I appreciate the participation of all of our witnesses today as we sort through the challenges of government agencies and private and public institutions that must collaborate with one another and clearly communicate with the public so that the business of commerce, education, and life in general can proceed without major interruptions should H1N1 take hold in Connecticut.

We are holding this hearing now because it is the beginning of a very unusual and threatening flu season. But September is also

National Preparedness Month, and therefore a good time to remind everyone that you contribute to the well being of your own communities when you take time to inform yourself about existing threats and make personal or family plans to deal with those threats, should that be necessary. Preventing the spread of the flu is something that every single person can and must help with, and I hope that this hearing further inspires people from all walks to life to do their part.

As everyone knows by now, the threat we are talking about today, the H1N1 virus, is a fast-spreading disease that was first detected last spring. It reached pandemic proportions worldwide over the summer and appears to be making a comeback as the traditional flu season begins.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has estimated that a million people in the U.S. have become ill with H1N1 flu, and we can safely guess that millions more have likely been exposed to the virus

since then. We know that 9,000 have been hospitalized, and 593 have died. Here in Connecticut, about 2,000 cases have been confirmed and nine people have died.

Fortunately, unlike other crises we have faced, pandemic flu is one we have anticipated and planned for. In response to global outbreaks of Avian Flu, West Nile Virus, and SARS , the CDC developed a strategy for a coordinated national response to the growing threat of infectious diseases. The Homeland Security Council also published a national strategy for how to respond to a pandemic influenza. And, with support from the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Homeland Security, states too have developed plans for addressing pandemic flu.

Following the spring outbreak, the medical and pharmaceutical communities has had time to study the H1N1 virus and to start producing a vaccine. And agencies at all levels of

government have gotten advance warning that they need to be prepared for the possibility of a more virulent strain of the virus this fall - even though as of today, thankfully, that has not happened. We hope that those agencies have used their time wisely.

Today, I will ask our witnesses representing state and federal agencies what their H1N1 response plans are, whether they are working together, and what else can be done to address a large outbreak of H1N1. I will ask our witnesses representing the public, educational institutions and business if the government planning has been clear and constructive and what if anything else they would think should be included.

It appears that the federal government can begin delivery of the H1N1 vaccine to states as early as the week after next.

Connecticut is expected to receive about 500,000 doses by mid October, which will be reserved for those most at risk: pregnant women, young children, daycare workers, health care and

emergency medical personnel, and those with certain conditions such as diabetes and immune deficiencies.

The federal government is also providing money to states to help prepare for the fall flu season and to administer the vaccine. According to Admiral Milner, our witness today from the Department of Health and Human Services, Connecticut has received \$6.4 million of this emergency public health funding and can expect an additional \$10.4 million.

At this point, the state appears to be on track to stay out in front of a broad H1N1 outbreak. We are fortunate that, so far, most cases of the virus have continued to show the same mild to moderate symptoms as we observed last spring, but outbreaks of infectious diseases are hard to predict, so circumstances could still change dramatically over the coming weeks and months. And remember, nine people have already died from H1N1 flu, so this was not a mild outbreak for their families.

Therefore, we must remain on heightened alert, continue to take preventative action, work together and hone communications with the public, and – while hoping for the best – we must prepare for the worst. I look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses today to get a clear sense of Connecticut’s preparedness for this potentially dangerous influenza strain and to see what our Committee and the Congress can do to help.

Thank you.