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Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on Oversight of
Government Management, the Federal Workforce,
and the District of Columbia, Senate Committee
on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

For Release on Delivery
Expected at 10:00 a.m. EDT
Tuesday, June 16, 2009

INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

Greater Agency
Accountability Needed to
Protect Federal Workers in
the Event of a Pandemic

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Highlights of [GAO-09-783T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Why GAO Did This Study

As evidenced by the spring 2009 outbreak of the H1N1 virus, an influenza pandemic remains a real threat to the nation and the world and has the potential to shut down work critical to the smooth functioning of society. This testimony addresses (1) the extent to which federal agencies have made pandemic plans to protect workers who cannot work remotely and are not first responders; (2) the pandemic plans selected agencies have for certain occupations performing essential functions other than first response; and (3) the opportunities to improve agencies' workforce pandemic plans.

The issues discussed in the testimony are based on the GAO report, *Influenza Pandemic: Increased Agency Accountability Could Help Protect Federal Employees Serving the Public in the Event of a Pandemic* ([GAO-09-404](#), June 12, 2009). In this report, GAO recommended that the Homeland Security Council (HSC) request that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) monitor and report to the Executive Office of the President on the readiness of agencies to continue operations while protecting their employees in the event of a pandemic. To help carry out its oversight role, the Congress may want to consider requiring a similar report from DHS. The HSC noted that it will give serious consideration to the findings and recommendations in the report, and DHS said the report will contribute to its efforts to ensure government entities are well prepared for what may come next.

View [GAO-09-783T](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Bernice Steinhardt, (202) 512-6543 or steinhardt@gao.gov.

INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

Greater Agency Accountability Needed to Protect Federal Workers in the Event of a Pandemic

What GAO Found

GAO surveyed the 24 agencies employing nearly all federal workers to gain an overview of governmentwide pandemic influenza preparedness efforts and found that a wide range of pandemic planning activities are under way. However, as of early 2009, several agencies reported that they were still developing their pandemic plans and their measures to protect their workforce. For example, several agencies had yet to identify essential functions during a pandemic that cannot be performed remotely. In addition, although many of the agencies' pandemic plans rely on telework to carry out their functions, five agencies reported testing their information technology capability to little or no extent.

To get a more in-depth picture of agency planning, GAO selected three case study agencies that represent essential occupations other than first response that cannot be performed remotely. The three case study occupations—correctional workers, production staff disbursing federal checks, and air traffic controllers—showed differences in the degree to which their individual facilities had operational pandemic plans. For example, the Bureau of Prisons' correctional workers had only recently been required to develop pandemic plans for their correctional facilities. Nevertheless, the Bureau of Prisons has considerable experience limiting the spread of infectious disease within its correctional facilities and had also made arrangements for antiviral medications for a portion of its workers and inmates. The Department of the Treasury's Financial Management Service, which has production staff involved in disbursing federal payments such as Social Security checks, had pandemic plans for its four regional centers and had stockpiled personal protective equipment such as respirators, gloves, and hand sanitizers at the centers. Air traffic control management facilities, where air traffic controllers work, had not yet developed facility pandemic plans or incorporated pandemic plans into their all-hazards contingency plans. The Federal Aviation Administration had recently completed a study to determine the feasibility of the use of respirators by air traffic controllers and concluded that their long-term use during a pandemic appears to be impractical.

There is no mechanism in place to monitor and report on agencies' progress in developing workforce pandemic plans. Under the *National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan*, DHS was required to monitor and report on the readiness of departments and agencies to continue operations while protecting their employees during an influenza pandemic. The HSC, however, informed DHS in late 2006 or early 2007 that no specific reports on this were required to be submitted. Rather, the HSC requested that agencies certify to the council that they were addressing in their plans the applicable elements of a pandemic checklist in 2006 and again in 2008. This process did not include any assessment or reporting on the status of agency plans. Given agencies' uneven progress in developing their pandemic plans, monitoring and reporting would enhance agencies' accountability for protecting their employees in the event of a pandemic.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss our recent study of federal agencies' plans to protect their workers in the event of an influenza pandemic.¹ Our report focused on the protection of federal employees, not classified as emergency first responders, yet necessary for ensuring the continuity of the country's critical operations. Although some of these employees will be able to perform their agencies' essential functions remotely through arrangements such as telework, others, such as federal correctional workers, production staff involved in disbursing federal payments such as Social Security checks, and air traffic controllers, will have to work at assigned locations where there will be an increased chance of infection due to proximity to others. As we were recently reminded by the spring 2009 outbreak of the H1N1 virus, an influenza pandemic remains a real threat to our nation and the world and has the potential to shut down work critical to the smooth functioning of our society. Given the important role that the federal government will play in the national response to a pandemic, planning to ensure the safety and well-being of federal employees is vital to the success of government operations.

This statement is based on our June 12, 2009 report and focuses on (1) the extent to which agencies have made pandemic plans to protect workers who cannot work remotely and are not first responders; (2) the pandemic plans selected agencies have for certain occupations performing essential functions other than first response; and (3) the opportunities to improve agencies' workforce pandemic plans.

To address our objectives, we surveyed the pandemic coordinators from the 24 agencies covered by the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990,² which we supplemented with a case study approach. We used the survey to get an overview of governmentwide pandemic influenza preparedness efforts. The survey questions asked about pandemic plans; essential functions other than first response that employees cannot perform remotely; protective measures, such as procuring pharmaceutical interventions;

¹GAO, *Influenza Pandemic: Increased Agency Accountability Could Help Protect Federal Employees Serving the Public in the Event of a Pandemic*, GAO-09-404 (Washington, D.C.: June 12, 2009).

²31 U.S.C. § 901. A list of the 24 CFO Act agencies appears in app. I. The CFO Act agencies employ nearly all federal employees.

social distancing strategies;³ information technology (IT) testing; and communication of human capital pandemic policies. The survey was conducted from May through July 2008, and the results were confirmed or updated in early 2009. To get a more in-depth picture of agency planning, we selected for case studies three occupations that represent essential functions (other than first responders): correctional workers employed by the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Bureau of Prisons (BOP); production staff responsible for disbursing federal payments in the Department of the Treasury's (Treasury) Financial Management Service (FMS); and air traffic controllers employed by the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). We undertook this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. The standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

In summary, our report found the following:

- Agency progress in pandemic planning is uneven. Although all of the 24 CFO Act agencies reported being engaged in planning for pandemic influenza to some degree, several agencies reported that they were still developing their pandemic plans and their measures to protect their workforce.
- The three case study agencies also showed differences in the degree to which their individual facilities had operational pandemic plans. BOP's correctional workers had only recently been required to develop pandemic plans for their correctional facilities. Treasury's FMS had pandemic plans for its four regional centers and had stockpiled personal protective equipment. By contrast, air traffic control management facilities, where air traffic controllers work, had not yet developed facility pandemic plans or incorporated pandemic plans into their all-hazards contingency plans.
- There is no mechanism in place to monitor and report on agencies' progress in developing workforce pandemic plans. Instead of having the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) monitor agency readiness to continue operations while protecting their employees during an influenza

³Social distancing is a technique used to minimize close contact among persons in public places, such as work sites and public areas.

pandemic, as originally envisioned under the *National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan (Implementation Plan)*, the Homeland Security Council (HSC)⁴ requested that agencies certify to the council that they were addressing in their plans the applicable elements of a pandemic checklist without including any provisions to assess the progress agencies were making.

Background

Approximately 2.6 million federal employees throughout the United States and abroad execute the responsibilities of the federal government. Federal employees work in every state, with about 90 percent outside the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. They perform functions across a multitude of sectors, from those vital to the long-term well-being of the country—such as environmental protection, intelligence, social work, and financial services—to those directly charged with aspects of public safety—including corrections, airport and aviation safety, medical services, border protection, and agricultural safety.

Worker protection strategies are crucial to sustain an adequate workforce during a pandemic. During the peak of an outbreak of a severe influenza pandemic in the United States, an estimated 40 percent of the workforce could be unable to work because of illness, the need to care for ill family members, or fear of infection. Under the *Implementation Plan*, all federal agencies are expected to develop their own pandemic plans that along with other requirements, describe how each agency will provide for the safety and health of its employees and support the federal government's efforts to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a pandemic. Because the dynamic nature of pandemic influenza requires that the scope of federal government continuity of operations (COOP) planning⁵ includes

⁴The HSC was established pursuant to Executive Order 13228, on October 8, 2001, for purposes of advising and assisting the President with respect to all aspects of homeland security and to serve as a mechanism for ensuring (1) coordination of homeland security-related activities of executive departments and agencies and (2) effective development and implementation of homeland security policies. The Congress subsequently established the HSC for the purpose of more effectively coordinating the policies and functions of the federal government relating to homeland security. See Homeland Security Act of 2002, Pub. L. No. 107-296 (Nov. 25, 2002), 6 U.S.C. § 491 and § 494. On May 26, 2009, President Obama issued a statement outlining his decision to integrate White House staff supporting national security and homeland security. The HSC will be maintained as the principal venue for interagency deliberations on issues that affect the security of the homeland, such as terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, natural disasters, and pandemic influenza.

⁵COOP planning is an effort conducted by agencies to ensure that the capability exists to continue essential agency functions across a wide range of potential emergencies.

preparing for a catastrophic event that is not geographically or temporally bounded, the Federal Emergency Management Agency concluded that planning for a pandemic requires a state of preparedness that is beyond traditional federal government COOP planning. For example, for pandemic planning purposes, essential functions may be more inclusive and extend longer than the 30-day traditional COOP-essential functions.

Agencies Report Being in Various Stages of Planning for the Protection of Their Employees in the Event of a Pandemic

Our survey questions for the 24 agencies were drawn from pandemic planning checklists and federal guidance⁶ to help agencies plan for protecting their employees during a pandemic. The 24 agencies we surveyed reported being in various stages of formulating their pandemic plans. While most of the agencies had developed plans, several reported that they were still formulating their plans. For example, in February 2009, the Small Business Administration (SBA) reported that it had begun to draft a more complete pandemic influenza annex to its COOP plan with an estimated completion date of spring 2009. The Department of Defense (DOD) had completed its overarching departmentwide plan, and DOD reported that its installations were tailoring their Force Health Protection Plans to include pandemic influenza considerations.

Identifying essential functions and enumerating the employees who would perform them is the first step in training those employees, communicating the risks and expectations of working during a pandemic, and planning and budgeting for measures that would mitigate those risks. Nineteen agencies reported that they had identified essential functions at both the department and component levels that cannot be continued through telework in the event of pandemic influenza or, in the case of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the National Science Foundation (NSF), determined that all of their essential or important government functions could be performed remotely. Of the remaining 5 agencies, DOJ reported identifying essential functions at the component level but noted that it was revising its department-level plan. At the time of our survey, the General Services Administration (GSA) reported not identifying its essential functions in the event of a pandemic while three agencies—DOD, SBA, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)—were in the process of either identifying essential functions or determining which

⁶The Web site, www.pandemicflu.gov, provides access to U.S. government avian and pandemic influenza information and guidance.

functions could be continued through telework. The pandemic coordinators in three agencies did not know whether the employees who performed essential functions in their agencies had been notified that they might be expected to continue operations during a pandemic.

We also asked the pandemic coordinators from the 24 agencies whether they had planned or budgeted for any of seven potential measures to protect workers whose duties require their on-site presence during a pandemic. The measures included in our survey included procurement of personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves; supplemental cleaning programs for common areas; distribution of hygiene supplies (hand sanitizers, trash receptacles with hands-free lids, etc.); obtaining antiviral medications; arrangements to obtain pandemic vaccines to the extent available; prioritization of employees for vaccinations; and prioritization of employees for antiviral medications. Federal pandemic guidance recommends the measures according to risk assessments for employees, and therefore, based on the agencies' mission and activities, not all measures are equally appropriate for all agencies. The most frequently reported measure was procurement of personal protective equipment with 19 agencies reporting that they had planned or budgeted for this measure. For example, DHS reported that it had done fit testing of employees for N95 respirators⁷ and training on the proper use of other personal protective equipment and had pre-positioned stockpiles of the equipment for employees in 52 locations. Prioritization of employees for vaccinations was the measure least frequently reported with 11 agencies reporting that they had taken this measure.

The survey showed that agencies' most frequently cited social distancing strategies involved using telework and flexible schedules for their workforces. Restrictions on meetings and gatherings and avoiding unnecessary travel were also part of 18 agencies' plans. Although many of the agencies' pandemic influenza plans rely on social distancing strategies, primarily telework, to carry out the functions of the federal government in the event of a pandemic outbreak, only one agency, NSF stated that it tested its IT infrastructure to a great extent. The agency reported assessing its telework system formally several times each year and each day through

⁷An N95 respirator is designed to protect an individual from breathing in very small particles, which might contain viruses. This type of respirator fits tightly to the face so that most air is inhaled through the filter material. To work most effectively, N95 respirators must be specially fitted for each person who wears one.

various means. On the other hand, five agencies reported testing their IT systems to little or not extent. Table 1 shows the survey responses.

Table 1: Agencies' Responses on the Extent to Which They Have Tested IT Infrastructure to Ensure That It Is Capable of Handling Telework or Work-at-Home Arrangements during a Pandemic Influenza Outbreak

Extent	Agencies
To a great extent	NSF
To a moderate extent	DOC, DOE, DOI, DOL, DOS, DOT, Education, EPA, OPM, NRC, SSA
To some extent	DOJ, HHS, HUD, DOD, Treasury, USAID, VA
To little or no extent	DHS, GSA, NASA, SBA, USDA

Legend: DOC = Department of Commerce, DOE = Department of Energy, DOI = Department of the Interior, DOL= Department of Labor, DOS = Department of State, EPA = Environmental Protection Agency, HHS = Department of Health and Human Services, NASA = National Aeronautics and Space Administration, SSA = Social Security Administration, USDA = Department of Agriculture, VA = Department of Veterans Affairs.

Source: GAO analysis of agency responses.

Given the potential severity of a pandemic, it is important that employees understand the policies and requirements of their agencies and the alternatives, such as telework, that may be available to them. Many employees and their supervisors will have questions about their rights, entitlements, alternative work arrangements, benefits, leave and pay flexibilities, and hiring flexibilities available during the turmoil created by a pandemic. Therefore, it is important that each agency implement a process to communicate its human capital guidance for emergencies to managers and make staff aware of that guidance. Twenty-one of the 24 pandemic coordinators surveyed reported making information available to their employees on how human capital policies and flexibilities will change in the event of a pandemic outbreak. Three agencies—DOC, GSA, and SSA—reported that they have not. Of the agencies that reported making information available, two had done so indirectly. HUD stated that it shared information with unions, and Treasury reported that it briefed its human capital officers on the human capital policies and flexibilities available to address pandemic issues.

Pandemic Preparations for Correctional Workers, Production Staff Responsible for Disbursing Federal Payments, and Air Traffic Controllers Are in Various Stages of Development

BOP Has Taken Steps to Protect Correctional Workers in the Event of a Pandemic

BOP, a component of DOJ, has the mission of protecting society by confining offenders in the controlled environments of prisons and community-based facilities that are safe, humane, cost-efficient, and appropriately secure and that provide work and other self-improvement opportunities to assist offenders in becoming law-abiding citizens. Approximately 35,000 federal employees ensure the security of federal prisons and provide inmates with programs and services.

BOP's pandemic influenza plan was developed through its Office of Emergency Preparedness and was disseminated to its central office and six regional offices in May 2008. BOP's pandemic plan addresses the need for infection control measures to mitigate influenza transmission and calls for education of correctional workers and the inmate population. Accordingly, all facilities are instructed that they should have readily available and ample supplies of bar soap and liquid soap in the restrooms, alcohol-based wipes throughout the facility, and hand sanitizers if approved by the warden. Based on a historical review of the 1918 pandemic influenza and HHS' pandemic planning assumptions, BOP intends to supply antiviral medication to 15 percent of correctional workers and inmates in each facility if the influenza outbreak is geographically spread throughout the United States.

BOP has some challenges in preparing for pandemic influenza. For example, social distancing measures to protect correctional workers are difficult to implement at the facility level. BOP officials said that there are many situations in which close contact is inevitable between correctional

workers and inmates and where personal protective equipment, such as gloves and masks, would not be feasible. A unique pandemic planning challenge facing federal correctional workers is the maintenance of an effective custodial relationship between them and the inmates in federal prisons. According to BOP officials, this relationship depends on communication and mutual trust, as correctional workers in federal prisons do not carry weapons or batons inside the cellblocks. Rather, they use verbal methods of communication to keep order. BOP officials at United States Penitentiary Leavenworth said that they would not allow a situation where correctional workers wear N95 respirators or surgical masks but the inmates do not.

Despite the challenges BOP faces with pandemic influenza planning, the bureau has advantages, which are unique to its facilities. Every correctional facility is a closed and self-contained system, and each facility is somewhat self-sufficient, maintaining a 30-day supply of food, water, and other necessities for any type of contingency. Correctional facilities also have well-tested experience in emergency and health hazard planning and management and infection control, which provides them with a solid foundation to build on for pandemic influenza preparedness. Additionally, correctional facilities generally have strong ties with their local communities, important because pandemic influenza will be largely addressed by the resources available to each community it affects.

FMS Has Operational Pandemic Plans for Production Staff Responsible for Disbursing Federal Payments

FMS, a component of Treasury, provides central payment services to federal agencies, operates the federal government's collections and deposit systems, provides governmentwide accounting and reporting services, and manages the collection of delinquent debt owed to the government. FMS has four regional financial centers that are production facilities that rely heavily on integrated computer and telecommunications systems to perform their mission. However, they also rely on light manufacturing operations to print and enclose checks for releasing at specific times of the month. Nearly 206 million of FMS's payments were disbursed by check in fiscal year 2008.

A regional center Deputy Director said that the organization is aware that the basis of part of the U.S. economy rests on the regional financial centers and that they will need to issue payments even during a pandemic. For the most part, the regional financial centers are planning that in the event of a pandemic, the nature of their business will be unchanged, but there will be issues with sickness, absenteeism, communication, and hygiene that they must address. Employees whose positions require, on a

daily basis, direct handling of materials or on-site activity that cannot be handled remotely or at an alternative worksite are not eligible for telework. According to an FMS official, even with a minimum crew on-site to produce paper checks, there will be instances when employees will need to be within 3 feet of other employees.

As part of the regional center pandemic plans, officials researched the types of supplies they would need based on the risks faced in their facilities. For example, in the Kansas City regional financial center the janitorial staff now routinely wipes off door handles, tabletops, and other high-traffic areas. As another part of the Kansas City regional plan, the center stocks such items as N95 respirators, gloves, hand sanitizers, disinfectants, and fanny packs that include items such as ready to eat meals, hand-cranked flashlights, small first-aid kits, and emergency blankets.

The FMS regional financial centers face some unique pandemic planning challenges. Since the centers are production facilities with large open spaces as well as enclosed office areas, pandemic planning requires different responses for different areas. An FMS official noted that employees' response and diligence in following disease containment measures in the different areas would be what determines the success of those measures. Scheduling of production personnel is also a challenge. Since the production of the checks must be done according to a deadline and internal controls must be maintained, schedules are not flexible. FMS officials had not made any arrangements for pandemic pharmaceutical interventions for the regional financial centers in part because the relatively small number of essential employees required to be on-site, as well as the large open spaces in the regional facilities, make social distancing measures more feasible.

FAA Pandemic Plans to Protect Air Traffic Controllers Are Not Ready for Implementation

FAA, a component of DOT, expects the National Airspace System to function throughout an influenza pandemic, in accordance with the preparedness and response goal of sustaining infrastructure and mitigating impact to the economy and the functioning of society. Maintaining the functioning of the National Airspace System will require that FAA's air traffic controllers, who ensure that aircraft remain safely separated from other aircraft, vehicles, and terrain, continue to work on-site. While FAA expects the demand for air traffic control, which manages cargo as well as passenger travel, to be reduced in the event of a severe pandemic outbreak, its contingency plans assume full air traffic levels as a starting

baseline. According to an FAA official, although passenger travel may be diminished, the shipping of cargo may increase.

The Air Traffic Organization, FAA's line of business responsible for the air traffic management services that air traffic controllers provide, had not directed facilities, such as its air route traffic control centers, to develop pandemic-specific plans or incorporate these pandemic plans into their all-hazards contingency plans. FAA officials said that all-hazards contingency and continuity plans are adapted to the facility level and are regularly implemented during natural disasters such as hurricanes. Although these plans are not specific to a pandemic, FAA officials reported that the all-hazards plans allow the Air Traffic Organization to mitigate the impact of adverse events, including reduced staffing levels on National Airspace Systems operations. The Air Traffic Organization plans to direct its facilities to develop pandemic-specific plans or enhance their preexisting all-hazards contingency plans at the local field facility level after a number of actions, such as the development of an FAA workforce protection policy, are completed.

Protecting air traffic controllers in the event of a pandemic outbreak is particularly challenging for several reasons. Air traffic controllers work in proximity to one another; the 6 feet of separation recommended for social distancing during a pandemic by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration is not possible for them. In addition, air traffic controllers cannot use personal protective equipment such as N95 respirators or surgical masks, as these impede the clear verbal communication necessary to maintain aviation safety. FAA recently completed a study examining the feasibility of air traffic controllers using powered air purifying respirators.⁸ Because of a number of concerns with using the respirators, such as noise, visibility, and comfort, FAA officials concluded that their long-term use during a pandemic appears to be impractical. Moreover, cross-certification of air traffic controllers is problematic. Attaining full performance levels for the controllers takes up to 3 years, and air traffic controllers proficient in one area of airspace cannot replace controllers proficient in another airspace without training and certification. Finally, FAA regulations on medication for air traffic controllers are strict because certain medications may impair

⁸Powered air purifying respirators use a powered blower to force air through a filter. They typically have a hood connected by a flexible hose to a blower unit that is equipped with a filter and powered by a battery.

an air traffic controller's performance. The Office of Aviation Medicine's policy on the use of antiviral medication for prophylactic use by on-duty controllers was still in draft as of early 2009.

Monitoring and Reporting on Agencies' Pandemic Workforce Protection Plans Could Improve Efforts to Protect Employees in the Event of a Pandemic

The survey results from the 24 CFO Act agency pandemic coordinators, as well as information from the case study agencies, indicate that a wide range of pandemic planning activities are under way and that all of the agencies are taking steps to some degree to protect their workers in the event of a pandemic. However, agencies' progress is uneven, and while we recognize that the pandemic planning process is evolving and is characterized by uncertainty and constrained resources, some agencies are clearly in the earlier stages of developing their pandemic plans and being able to provide the health protection related to the risk of exposure their essential employees may experience.

Under the HSC's *Implementation Plan*, DHS was charged with, among other things, monitoring and reporting to the Executive Office of the President on the readiness of departments and agencies to continue their operations while protecting their workers during an influenza pandemic. DHS officials reported that in late 2006 or early 2007 they asked HSC representatives with direct responsibility for the *Implementation Plan* for clarification on the issue of reporting agencies' ability to continue their operations while protecting their workers during a pandemic. DHS officials said they were informed that they did not have to prepare a report. Instead, according to White House counsel representatives, the HSC planned to take on the monitoring role through its agency pandemic plan certification process.

In November 2006, the HSC issued *Key Elements of Departmental Pandemic Influenza Operational Plan (Key Elements)*, which covered areas such as dealing with the safety and health of department employees and essential functions and services and how agencies will maintain them in the event of significant and sustained absenteeism during a pandemic. The *Key Elements* document stated that to ensure uniform preparedness across the U.S. government, the HSC was including a request that by December 2006 the agencies certify in writing to the HSC that they were addressing applicable elements of the checklist. Subsequently, in August 2008, the HSC revised the *Key Elements* to reflect current federal government guidance on pandemic planning and included a request for recertification.

However, the HSC's certification process, as implemented, did not provide for monitoring and reporting as envisioned in the *Implementation Plan*

regarding agencies' abilities to continue operations in the event of a pandemic while protecting their employees. In addition, as originally envisioned in the Implementation Plan, the report was to be directed to the Executive Office of the President, with no provision in the plan for the report to be made available to the Congress.

Concluding Observations and Prior Recommendations

The spring 2009 outbreak of H1N1 influenza accentuates the responsibility of agencies to have pandemic plans that ensure their ability to continue operations while protecting their workers who serve the American public. As evidenced by our survey results and case studies, some agencies are not close to having operational pandemic plans, particularly at the facility level. In addition, there is no real monitoring mechanism in place to ensure that agencies' workforce pandemic plans are complete. A monitoring process should be in place that would ensure that federal agencies are making progress in developing their plans to protect their workforce in the event of a pandemic and that agencies have the information and guidance they need to develop operational pandemic plans.

To address this issue, our report recommended that the HSC request that the Secretary of Homeland Security monitor and report to the Executive Office of the President on the readiness of agencies to continue their operations while protecting their workers during an influenza pandemic. The reporting should include an assessment of the agencies' progress in developing their plans including any key challenges and gaps in the plans. The request should also establish a specific time frame for reporting on these efforts. We also suggested that to help support its oversight responsibilities, the Congress may want to consider requiring DHS to report to it on agencies' progress in developing and implementing their pandemic plans, including any key challenges and gaps in the plans. The HSC commented that the report makes useful points regarding opportunities for enhanced monitoring and reporting within the executive branch concerning agencies' progress in developing plans to protect their workforce. DHS commented that our recommendations would contribute to its future efforts to ensure that government entities are well prepared for what may come next.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, this completes my statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you might have.

Contacts and Acknowledgments

For further information on this testimony, please contact Bernice Steinhardt, Director, Strategic Issues, at (202) 512-6543 or steinhardtb@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this testimony. Individuals making key contributions to this testimony include William J. Doherty, Assistant Director, Judith C. Kordahl, Senior Analyst, and Karin Fangman, Deputy Assistant General Counsel.

Appendix I: Chief Financial Officers Act Agencies

Department of Agriculture
Department of Commerce
Department of Defense
Department of Education
Department of Energy
Department of Health and Human Services
Department of Homeland Security
Department of Housing and Urban Development
Department of the Interior
Department of Justice
Department of Labor
Department of State
Department of Transportation
Department of the Treasury
Department of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Agency for International Development
Environmental Protection Agency
General Services Administration
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
National Science Foundation
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of Personnel Management
Small Business Administration
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