Be Protected from the Unexpected

Public health emergencies cover a wide array of events. They include infectious disease pandemics, natural disasters and severe weather, as well as man-made events, such as bioterrorism and chemical emergencies. Some disasters require the dispensing of medical countermeasures, otherwise known as medications and medical supplies, to lessen the impact of public health emergencies. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention maintains a cache of medications and life-saving supplies in the Strategic National Stockpile that will be provided to states and local health agencies at no charge in case of such emergencies.

Dispensing medical countermeasures is no easy feat. Peoria City/County Health Department is responsible for preparing for events that would require dispensing medical countermeasures to the entire Peoria County population. Although difficult, this endeavor is made easier through collaborations with community partners. Through collaboration, the health department has established agreements with community partners to use their facilities to dispense medical countermeasures to the general public, but this is only part of the dispensing strategy.

The health department also seeks collaboration to establish Closed Points of Dispensing (PODs). Closed PODs dispense medical countermeasures to a limited, predetermined population. Their role is to alleviate the burden of facilities open to the public. If more community partners operate Closed PODs, then less people will need to visit a public dispensing site. Closed PODs can also enter into agreements that allow them to pick up medical countermeasures and dispense them to their employees, employees’ family members, and clients.

Although any organization or business can establish a Closed POD, it is vital to establish Closed PODs with community partners that serve vulnerable populations. It would be difficult for older populations and those with functional needs to potentially wait for hours in line for medical countermeasures at a public dispensing site. It would also be difficult for poorer individuals to access public dispensing sites without a reliable form of transportation to and from the site. For this reason, Peoria City/County Health Department is committed to establishing Closed PODs with nursing homes, those serving clients with functional
needs, those serving the indigent population, and other potential partners whose clients
may have barriers to accessing public dispensing sites.

Planning a Closed POD can seem overwhelming, but with the help of the Peoria
City/County Health Department’s Emergency Preparedness program personnel, these
organizations and businesses will be guided through the planning and implementation
process, as well as any organizational challenges. One such challenge for establishing
Closed PODs in the community concerns the question of liability. Many agencies and
organizations believe in the mission of Closed PODs, but are concerned that their
organization will be held liable for any adverse medical reactions and the outcomes of those
reactions. The health department staff can provide useful resources for help in
understanding governmental acts that cover this type of challenge.

Specifically to address liability, the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act
(PREP Act) shields organizations and individuals involved in the medical countermeasure
dispensing process from liability barring any willful misconduct. After the U.S. Department
of Health and Human Services issues a PREP Act declaration, any individual or
organization involved in dispensing medical countermeasures is protected.

The Peoria City/County Health Department is currently accepting new community partners
to collaborate and participate as Closed PODs to ensure that the Peoria County population
receives medical countermeasures when a public health emergency arises. Agencies and
organizations can benefit from operating as a Closed POD by contacting the Peoria
City/County Health Department Emergency Preparedness program at
emergency.prep@peoriacounty.org.

Learn more about the benefits of public health policies and programs at www.pcchd.org -
Peoria City/County Health Department, a nationally accredited public health department.

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The Peoria City/County Health Department continues efforts to
improve community health in Peoria County with the overarching goal
“to increase the number of people who are healthy at every stage of life.”