

County plans for crises in public health

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Sullivan County is continuing to develop a plan to protect its residents in case of a public health emergency such as a flu pandemic.

The Greater Sullivan County All Health Hazard Region conducted a three-hour tabletop discussion recently in Sunapee where it continued to work on a plan started almost two years ago.

"We're working strongly to be in a prepared mode," Sullivan County Manager Ed Gil de Rubio said. "We have a solid plan and within the next four or five months we will finalize the plan."

The main body of the plan is divided into four areas: operations, preparedness, response and recovery.

The operations section describes the roles and responsibilities of the local emergency operations center while the other three sections provide general activities for

public health events.

"We're way ahead of where we were last year at this time," Gil de Rubio said.

According to Gil de Rubio, the group just received a \$75,000 grant for a public health coordinator with Steve Cunningham of Croydon appointed to that position.

The entire program is funded through federal grants received by the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services.

Of great concern is the possible outbreak of avian flu.

Avian flu, more commonly known as the bird flu, first appeared in 1997 in Hong Kong where it infected both chickens and people. During the outbreak, 18 people were hospitalized and six died.

The difference between the Avian flu and the common seasonal flu is people have no immunity to Avian flu and there is not a vaccine available.

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During the tabletop discussion, four scenarios were introduced ranging from a World Health Organization alert to the possibility of the Avian flu infecting a majority of the population in the county.

"If something happens, the committee members can be notified of emergencies through the use of Croydon's reverse 911," Gil de Rubio said.

Representatives from schools, businesses, hospitals and police and fire departments are involved with the group.

The 15 municipalities participating in the county's all health hazard region are Acworth, Charlestown, Claremont, Croydon, Goshen, Langdon, Lempster, New London, Newbury, Newport, Springfield, Sunapee, Sutton, Unity and Wilmot.

For more information about the program visit www.steelpen.com/sullivancounty.

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