

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927  
Minority (202) 225-3641

April 20, 2017

The Honorable Thomas E. Price, M.D.  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Price:

Pursuant to Rules X and XI of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Committee on Energy and Commerce is examining the status and adequacy of HHS pandemic influenza planning and preparedness.

In November 2005, HHS issued the HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan. This document “laid out guiding principles for pandemic influenza preparedness and response.”<sup>1</sup> The plan has served as a blueprint for all HHS pandemic influenza planning and response activities by outlining federal plans and preparation for public health and medical support; providing detailed guidance to state and local health departments; and outlining specific roles and responsibilities of HHS agencies in the event of a pandemic.

On November 19, 2015, the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing entitled, “U.S. Public Health Preparedness for Seasonal Influenza: Has the Response Improved?” As a follow-up to this hearing, Representative Gene Green submitted a question for the record to the Director of the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response at HHS. The question asked whether the U.S. public health response was in a position to respond today to the needs of 300 million Americans in the event of a pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, *National Pandemic Influenza Plans (2005-2009)*, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/planning-preparedness/national-strategy-planning.html> (last accessed Mar. 31, 2017).

As part of its response, HHS submitted the following to the Committee on August 17, 2016:

HHS is reviewing the HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan (2005) and preparing a revised plan that acknowledges our progress in MCM [medical countermeasures] development and will incorporate lessons learned from the 2009 H1N1 pandemic and other influenza outbreaks. The revised plan will incorporate new advancements in influenza vaccines, antivirals, diagnostics, and other surveillance and control measures. It will also introduce new technologies to help treat, prevent, and minimize the impact of an emerging pandemic. Together, new goals will be enumerated for U.S. pandemic influenza preparedness and response in alignment with global goals and plans. *The new HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan is slated for release in late 2016.*<sup>2</sup>

As of this date of this letter, HHS has not yet released the Pandemic Influenza Plan. The need for the updated Pandemic Influenza Plan is vital as there is a current potential pandemic threat. The H7N9 avian influenza virus that emerged in 2013 is suddenly spreading in China, causing 918 laboratory-confirmed human infections and 359 deaths, as of January 16, 2017, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>3</sup> One expert in emerging viral diseases stated that “[w]e are facing the largest pandemic threat in the last 100 years.”<sup>4</sup> The WHO Director-General warned that H7N9 is particularly worrying as it could be a flu pandemic strain.<sup>5</sup>

To assist the Committee’s examination, please provide the following documents and information by May 4, 2017:

1. Please provide an update on the status of the HHS Pandemic Influenza plan. HHS did not release the HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan in late 2016 as expected. Why? Has HHS drafted the document? If so, has HHS circulated the document for comment?
2. Did HHS attempt to release the Pandemic Influenza Plan before January 20, 2017? Was the HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan ready for release on January 20, 2017? If so, why was there a delay in the release?
3. If the document is ready for release, please provide a copy to the Committee.
4. If the document is not ready for release, what is the target date for the release of the HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan?

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Public Health Preparedness for Seasonal Influenza: Has the Response Improved?, Hearing before the Subcomm. on Oversight & Investigations of the H. Comm. on Energy & Commerce, 114th Cong. 145 (2015) (Questions for the Record) (emphasis added).

<sup>3</sup> D. Normile, *Bird flu strain taking a toll on humans*, SCIENCE (Feb. 17, 2017), <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/02/bird-flu-strain-taking-toll-humans>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> M. Benitez and C. Yeung, *WHO warns of H7N9 pandemic*, STANDARD (Dec. 15, 2016), <http://www.thestandard.com.hk/section-news.php?id=177527>.

In addition, please provide a briefing to committee staff on the HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan. An attachment to this letter provides additional information about responding to the committee's request. If you have any questions regarding this request, and to schedule the requested briefing, please contact Alan Slobodin with the majority committee staff at (202) 225-2927. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Greg Walden  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce



Tim Murphy  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations

cc: The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Diana DeGette, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Energy and Commerce

Attachment