

Exercise Cygnus: CCS Round Table with Devolved Administrations

Background

- From 18-20 October 2016, the UK's ability to respond to a severe influenza pandemic was tested in by Exercise Cygnus.
- Participants included NHS England, PHE, Government departments, local authorities and LRFs, Devolved Administrations and SAGE.
- The DAs participated throughout the exercise, and were comprehensively involved in the planning.

Exercise

- DA officials contributed throughout, whilst Wales also involved their ministers Vaughan Gething AM (Cabinet Secretary for Health, Well-being and Sport) and Rebecca Evans AM (Minister for Social Services and Public Health)
- MCO was grateful for all DAs' participation, particularly the spirit in which they approached the exercise.

DA Feedback

- After the exercise, the DAs and DH underwent a debrief: they were tasked with identifying parts of the exercise that went well, and what needed improving.
- All DAs found the exercise useful, especially in bringing the need to update some legislation and pandemic preparedness plans to the attention of ministers.
- Communications between the DAs were particularly successful, with all four nations liaising regularly for SitReps. DAs expressed the usefulness of CMO meetings during the exercise in agreeing policy and strategy.
- Exercise Cygnus was felt most useful in raising awareness of the need to trigger the escalation of contingency plans, particularly surrounding the deployment of the military, excess deaths, surge management in healthcare facilities and population-based triage.
- Whilst DAs found the discussions on the escalation of contingency plans useful, there was a feeling that the issues raised, particularly in population-based triage, were rushed and not widely shared prior to the exercise. As a result, DAs felt they were not able to contribute as much as they would have liked.
- Although the DAs were complimentary of the planning on clinical management, some felt it was at the cost of social care.
- Northern Ireland raised the need to collaborate on cross-border issues and joined-up strategy with the Republic of Ireland.

Next Steps

- DH are working with the DAs to address the issues that were raised during the debrief. The draft policy on population-based triage is now available and has been circulated to the DAs.
- CCS is working with DH to finalise the strategy on excess deaths management. There will be a paper produced in the following months.
- DH and CCS welcome the full involvement of the DAs in all future pandemic preparedness planning.