



EXERCISE CYGNUS

Wales De-Brief Report

October 2016

Introduction

Exercise Cygnus was a Tier 1 UK pandemic flu exercise with full ministerial participation at COBR. In Wales, the Exercise began on the 14th October with a NHS workshop to consider the national and local arrangements for the storage and distribution of health countermeasures. It continued on 18th October with a multi-agency workshop in the Emergency Co-ordination Centre (Wales) (ECC(W)) involving multi-agency groups from all 4 Local Resilience Forums in Wales.

The main exercise took place on 19th and 20th October with the Chief Medical Officer leading on the COBR Officials meetings and the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Well-being and Sport and the Minister for Social Services and Public Health participating in the COBR Ministerial meetings. In the absence of testing the four Nations Health Ministers meetings, these COBR meetings determined the course of action adopted by all four Nations in response to a pandemic situation, ensuring a joined-up approach in minimising the risk to the health of the UK.

The ECC(W) was staffed for the two days with teams from Health, Resilience and Communications all participating.

When the initial exercise was postponed in 2014, Wales continued to participate and tested both the Welsh Government and the four Welsh Strategic Co-ordinating Groups' (SCG) response. Therefore, Wales did not test the SCG response on this occasion.

Instead, the NHS workshop held on the 14th October used the Exercise Cygnus scenario to test and validate health countermeasures arrangements. The multi-agency Workshop on 18th October was used to test and validate the LRF Pandemic plans to see if the plans were fit for purpose or needed refreshing whilst the main exercise on 19th and 20th October tested the Government response.

The LRF pandemic planning checklist and the various injects for the exercise were used to identify issues from the LRF perspective against the Cygnus scenario. The resulting information was used to brief the Chief Medical Officer and Ministers and to respond to COBR. The LRF Workshop event also served to provide additional evidence of risk mitigation to help inform Community Risk Registers.

Exercise Cygnus Pandemic Flu Countermeasures Awareness Workshop – 14th October

The Pandemic Flu Countermeasures Awareness Workshop involved all Wales NHS organisations and included NHS Emergency Planning Managers, Pharmacists and those responsible for their organisations main stores and logistics.

The workshop considered what countermeasures would be made available from the national stockpile and the mechanisms for local distribution across the NHS in Wales. The morning session provided a series of thought provoking presentations that raised awareness of the consumables, antivirals and antibiotics held in the national stockpile. In the afternoon, delegates had the opportunity to work through the Cygnus scenario and were able to explore the national and local arrangements for each of the countermeasures.

The outcomes from the workshop included the need for greater awareness of the countermeasures within each organisation and more focus on the operational arrangements. It was acknowledged that once a pandemic is threatened, the operational details to secure effective and efficient distribution across Wales would be quickly put into place.

The workshop was aimed at Emergency Planners, Executive Leads, pharmacists responsible for ordering and those that are responsible for the Main Stores / logistics in each of the Health Boards. The aim and objectives of the workshop set out below were fully met.

Objectives for the Day

- ☐ To explain why particular products are held within the national stockpile
- ☐ To share information on the range of countermeasures and explain their use
- ☐ To explain the National planning arrangements for storage and deployment
- ☐ To explore local planning requirements for receiving countermeasures, storage and distribution
- ☐ To identify areas for further planning and training
- ☐ To discuss the antiviral distribution options and issues for local planning

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – All organisations were asked to review their pandemic plans regarding health countermeasures to ensure they remained robust

Recommendation 2 – All organisations to ensure there is sufficient awareness within their organisations of what is held within the Welsh National Stockpile and how these would be distributed to them.

Recommendation 3 – All organisations to review their local delivery points and antiviral collection points to ensure they remained current and to share this information with Welsh Government.

Greater use should be made of Resilience Direct as a single platform for sharing information rather than relying upon the high level of e-mail traffic currently used.

The Welsh Government should be used as a conduit for consistent public messages and a plan should be developed for this purpose.

Question 7 - What public messages would you be issuing between June and 26 September and how is media handling being co-ordinated?

PHW would be leading nationally across all LRFs. The core messages would focus upon hygiene but would be low key at present. This would be supported at the all-Wales level by messages from the CMO. All messages should form part of a wider communications strategy developed by COBR. All website information in Wales would link to Public Health Wales for a single, definitive message.

Recommendations

Recommendation 4 - The Pan-Wales Response Plan should reflect the fact that Welsh Government needs to establish a Battle Rhythm early for all situation reporting to assess the impact of any emergency on the LRF areas and set out clearly and early what information is required.

The revise plan should also reflect the fact that when the ECC(W) is established it needs to act as a single point of contact for Welsh Government and all strategic information from Departments channelled through the ECC(W) to the SCGs and then to individual organisations. This ensures that a single reporting structure up and down. Welsh Government Departments should not communicate directly with organisations.

Recommendation 5 – The Welsh Government should consider a specific Wales Pandemic Flu Communications Plan which sets out all structures and processes to deliver consistent press and public messages during a flu pandemic and how UK pandemic information and messages are co-ordinated .