



King County

Dow Constantine

King County Executive

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December 27, 2023

The Honorable Dave Upthegrove
Chair, King County Council
Room 1200
C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Councilmember Upthegrove:

In response to Motion 15650, this letter transmits an updated Pandemic Influenza Response Plan report and a proposed Motion that, if enacted, would acknowledge receipt of the report.

As required, the enclosed report includes a new pandemic response plan that expands on past Pandemic Influenza Response Plans and uses lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. This report responds to the Motion by identifying critical infrastructure gaps and offering recommendations on how to fill these gaps. The new pandemic influenza response plan is now called the King County Biological Incident Response Annex, which is more comprehensive than past influenza pandemic response plans. With this broader name, the plan addresses responses to other viruses in addition to influenza, other natural causes of outbreaks, and human-caused biological incidents or outbreaks. “Annex” is an emergency preparedness term that refers to an operational plan.

As required, the enclosed report was drafted by Public Health – Seattle & King County (PHSKC) in coordination with the King County Office of Emergency Management. The new plan addresses each pandemic phase identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The plan includes a description of the responsibilities of governmental and nongovernmental agencies, including the Washington State Governor, the State Secretary of Health, the King County Executive, the King County Board of Health, the Local Health Officer, Public Health – Seattle & King County, and healthcare system organizations in the region.

Since February 2020, there have been almost 600,000 cases, close to 18,000 hospitalizations, and over 3,600 deaths from COVID-19 in King County. As substantial as these numbers and losses are, King County experienced one of the lowest death rates due to COVID-19 among large metropolitan areas in the U.S. The burdens of COVID-19, however, were not borne evenly across the population. Throughout the country, the virus had disproportionate impacts on the elderly, people with weakened immune systems, those with pre-existing chronic medical

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conditions and disabilities, and those in communities of color. In King County, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Black, Hispanic, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander residents endured substantially higher rates of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths than did Asian and white residents.

The report identifies critical infrastructure and resources that were lacking or insufficient during the COVID-19 response. These include gaps in disability access, limited language translation and interpretation, limited racial and ethnic diversity among PHSKC staff and volunteers, and service gaps resulting from staffing demands that exceeded available capacity. The report also identifies the infrastructure and resources that are currently insufficient to respond to future pandemics. The report outlines barriers to acquiring or developing this infrastructure and closes with recommendations for how to fill these gaps.

King County faces barriers to acquiring needed infrastructure for emergency responses. These include: limited staffing and funding levels, lack of flexibility in hiring and retention processes, a funding cycle that goes up and down in response to emergencies, a lack of bridge funding between funding cycles, and limited racial and ethnic diversity among staff and volunteers.

The report outlines recommendations for how to fill these incident response gaps, including:

1. Build and deepen community trust through relationships and communication;
2. Enact equity strategies to tailor actions and information to better serve specific communities, including Black, Indigenous, other people of color, people with disabilities, and residents living in less resourced locations;
3. Improve emergency response operations by using standard processes and coordination methods, and
4. Add workforce flexibility to allow staffing to align with pandemic surges.

The recommendations in the report are based on interviews with over 150 PHSKC staff and key partners who participated in the COVID-19 response from 2020 through 2022. In addition, community partners made recommendations in four virtual townhall meetings, which offered Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART) and live interpretation in multiple languages.

Thank you for your consideration of the report and proposed Motion. If your staff have questions, please contact Dr. Faisal Khan, Director, Public Health – Seattle & King County, at 206-477-6246.

Sincerely,

 for

Dow Constantine
King County Executive

Enclosure

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cc: King County Councilmembers

ATTN: Stephanie Cirkovich, Chief of Staff
Melani Hay, Clerk of the Council
Karan Gill, Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive
Penny Lipsou, Council Relations Director, Office of the Executive
Dr. Faisal Khan, Director, Public Health – Seattle & King County
Hikari Tamura, Deputy Director, Public Health – Seattle & King County
Lorraine Patterson-Harris, Director, Department of Executive Services
Brendan McCluskey, Director, King County Office of Emergency Management