

October 17, 2005



Federico Cruz-Uribe, MD, MPH
Director of Health

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Mike Leavitt
Secretary of Health and Human Services
Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

I am the Health Director for the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department. In this position, I am responsible for my community's readiness to confront pandemic flu. We have been working on our plan for quite some time and have engaged our partners at the state and local level to be as ready as we can be with our local resources. All of our tactics in confronting a pandemic from surveillance, Isolation and Quarantine, and to the use of social distancing techniques are geared toward slowing down the spread of the virus.

As you know, the time gained is needed for the production of a vaccine that can truly protect our citizens.

But, in the interim before a vaccine can be mass-produced, we need to keep our communities whole. Local governments need to continue to function, and our health care system needs to provide care to those who fall ill. Our pandemic flu plans call for the judicious use of anti-virals to help safeguard essential workers and to treat the desperately ill. Currently, we do not have a local stockpile, nor does our state government. We are relying on the federal system for this critical element. Is the federal stockpile sufficient?

You are in a better position to answer this than me. But, a pandemic flu plan without real and adequate local stockpiles of anti-virals will not work.

If, today, the current stockpile is not adequate, I ask that you recommend to the President of the United States that a public health emergency be declared. Our country without an adequate stockpile is in great peril if the pandemic were to occur in the near future. My Department has approached pharmaceutical companies in other countries who are in a position to mass-produce critically needed anti-virals but currently are stopped by patent laws and our FDA regulations. Patent laws can be suspended during the period of an emergency. FDA regulations can be streamlined during an emergency.

We face a real threat, and we are not prepared. It is our solemn obligation as public health officials to take the lead and develop the necessary resources to protect our communities. Please give this your fullest consideration.

Sincerely,

Federico Cruz-Uribe, MD, MPH, and TM
Director of Health

FCU:cjr

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