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Local News

🕒 Jan 10, 2006 8:51 pm US/Eastern

Report: NY Hospitals Not Prepared For A Flu

Poor Marks For Ability To Handle Major Outbreak



Marcia Kramer
Reporting

(CBS) NEW YORK New York State's health care system received poor marks on Tuesday for the way in handed out the flu vaccine to the elderly, and on its ability to handle a bird flu epidemic or any major illness outbreak.

The American College of Emergency Physicians says New York State Hospitals are poorly equipped to handle the surge in patients that would result from a bird flu epidemic or other such crises.

That comes as no surprise to local health care experts.

"The total capacity of the hospitals in New York City, let's say 75, to manage the number of people we could need to be in the hospitals is very limited," **Columbia University's** Dr. Irwin Redlener says.

Dr. Redlener is the director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness. What he's been saying about our ability to deal with a bird flu epidemic mirrors today's findings.

"We certainly don't have enough yet in our hospital system in terms of capacity to take care of the many people who would get very sick," Redlener says.

New York received an overall C+ grade in terms of its emergency care system, slightly higher than the C- rating given to the nation as a whole.

The preparedness report came as news was revealed of the death of 2,000 chickens in the past five days on the Caribbean island of Trinidad.

The deaths occurred on half a dozen large farms around Cumuto.

Local officials are investigating the cause of the chicken deaths and have urged calm. City Health Department officials told CBS 2 they are monitoring the Trinidad situation to see what the tests turn up.

Meanwhile, Dr. Redlener says the numbers here show the challenges that remain.

"We have eight million people in New York City," he says. "We don't have enough vaccine, nor will we in the next couple of years, to vaccinate even a tiny percentage of those who need to be vaccinated. We don't have enough anti-viral medications."

To New York City's credit, it has included hospitals in the emergency preparedness drills. The city has also built up its infectious disease surveillance structure and is developing a distribution plan for giving out antibiotics and vaccines.

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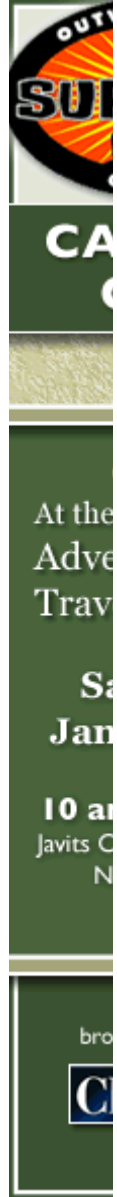
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