

Industry Advisory

CIP: H1N1 Influenza Outbreak Update

Initial Distribution: April 29, 2009

Additional Information Distributed: August 12, 2009

This advisory provides an actionable response framework should the severity of the H1N1 pandemic influenza outbreak worsen in the coming months.

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Primary Interest Groups: Management, Emergency Planners, Owners and Operators of Critical Facilities, IT Resources, Human Resources

Advisory:

Electricity sector entities have been preparing for a possible pandemic influenza outbreak for the past several years. The H5N1 avian flu virus, for example, had prompted the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare a phase 3 some time ago. In April 2009, a new virus was identified as H1N1 and during April, WHO moved quickly to phase 4 and 5. By June, WHO declared their highest phase 6 pandemic. Health authorities warn that this current H1N1 outbreak may worsen in the fall. This situation reinforces the need for electricity sector entities to reflect on the lessons-learned from this outbreak, review existing plans and enhance their ability to implement them to support their continuity of operations.

One of the important lessons we have learned from the current H1N1 outbreak is that the World Health Organization (WHO) phases, which many entities had used in their plans to trigger response actions, are designed to indicate the geographic spread of the virus and do not indicate the severity or impact of the virus. The WHO phase has been at the highest level 6 for some time now, but the moderate nature of illness has not required that we implement the more significant aspects of our plans.

This ES-ISAC Advisory provides an actionable response framework that entities may find useful in helping to guide decision-making should the severity of the illness worsen.

The ES-ISAC estimates that the risk to bulk power system reliability from this outbreak is currently LOW due to the current impact on communities. This evaluation is subject to change.

This Advisory is not intended to assess the likelihood or impact on public health of an influenza outbreak. Therefore all disease-related planning assumptions that entities use should be based on current information provided by relevant health authorities. This Advisory does not replace or supersede their advice.

Background:

The ES-ISAC's role is to monitor threats to grid reliability and share information amongst the electricity sector entities that will mitigate and respond to those threats. To help specifically with the current pandemic influenza threat, NERC has sponsored a group of industry volunteers to support the ES-ISAC as the Pandemic Influenza Working Group. The Working Group's mandate is to monitor this evolving situation, and use their expertise to provide advice and develop new planning guidance to be distributed across the sector as an ES-ISAC Advisory.

This guidance document provides a response-based framework to help entities decide when to trigger specific response actions, in accordance with their own plans, as the situation evolves. It is a framework that is being shared across North America and has been well received by other critical infrastructure sectors, health authorities, and government. Also, NERC and the Working Group are collaborating with the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Health and Human Services, and Public Health

Background:
(continued)

Agency of Canada to urge that they consider this response framework in developing an authoritative “severity index”. To that end, this framework may continue to evolve to enhance the ability to respond in a consistent and appropriate manner.

This Advisory is consistent with NERC's expectations that entities already have plans in place to respond to pandemic influenza, as part of their emergency plan.

Additional background information is available at:

http://www.nerc.com/fileUploads/File/Events%20Analysis/A-2009-08-12-01_Background.pdf

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