

**THE PANDEMIC AND ALL-HAZARDS PREPAREDNESS ACT:  
ADDRESSING PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY RESPONSES**

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Abstract

Preparing for public health emergencies continues to be a vital objective for federal, state, tribal, and local officials in the United States. Deficiencies in emergency response efforts during Hurricane Katrina coupled with ongoing national security threats of bioterrorism, pandemic flu, and other emerging infectious diseases justify ongoing public health preparedness efforts by public and private sectors. Still, many perceive that the United States is not prepared for a catastrophic public health emergency. Public health authorities and private sector health care entities lack national surveillance data to monitor threats, may not be able to fully meet surge capacity during emergencies, and do not know how to fairly allocate scarce resources (such as vaccines). Most importantly, national prioritization and responsibility for public health emergency responses are murky.

On December 19, 2006, President Bush signed the “Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act,” or “PAHPA.” PAHPA substantially reorganizes federal, state, and local efforts to address these (and other) issues with multiple implications for health care practitioners in public and private sectors. The Act (1) further centralizes preparedness response efforts within the federal Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), (2) requires new evidence-based objectives for state and local public health partners; (3) assigns DHHS responsibility for national distribution of scarce resources, such as available vaccine supplies, during emergencies; (4) urges improvement to meet medical surge capacities; and (5) provides initiatives to integrate medical innovations, research developments; and countermeasure procurement with infectious disease requirements and biodefense. Collectively these and other objectives of the Act have the potential to reform existing preparedness efforts that have lacked organization, direction, and utility. Subject to Congressional appropriations, the Act offers renewed guidance tied to measurable outcomes on key priorities.