



A flu pandemic has the potential to affect every segment of our population from children to older Pennsylvanians. While its impact is difficult to imagine, we need to understand the importance of planning for just such a serious public health crisis.

Pennsylvania is working hard to protect the public's health. This Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Summit will go a long way toward ensuring our 12.4 million residents are protected.

Three influenza pandemics occurred in the 20th century, taking the lives of 500,000 Americans in 1918-19, 70,000 in 1957-58 and 34,000 in 1968-69. Against this historical backdrop and recent reports from around the world, experts believe another influenza pandemic will come, but no one knows when it will emerge or what strain will be involved. The H5N1 avian influenza virus that is hitting a growing number of countries across the world has gained the attention of global, national and state health communities and has prompted them to accelerate and expand their preparation. The commonwealth's ability to respond to a potential public health emergency was showcased just last month after a performer from New York City fell ill following an event at Mansfield University in Tioga County. The 44-year-old man was diagnosed with inhalational anthrax and the news concerned many people. Promptly after the positive confirmation of the anthrax, Pennsylvania's public health investigation and risk communications plan was in action and a team was on campus talking with students and the members of the community.

We cannot, however, rely on past success and sit idle. Today's summit allows us to share and gather information from the federal government, state agencies and the private sector – and to access the expertise of a wide cross-section of individuals participating in this all-important effort. We will use the information gathered at this summit to revise and strengthen our pandemic influenza response plan and better protect our citizens.

No state wants to face a public health crisis, but we need to be ready. Pennsylvania is making sure that our front-line troops are organized and equipped for whatever incident, accident or disaster faces our residents.

Sincerely,

*Edmund G. Rendall*