

Governor Gabriel Cinomis, a Prairie Dog, gives his opinion of CBRN matters from his unique perspective



Prairie Dog

Ms Chuckworthy bade me not to write on the latest issue of concern, namely due to my overwhelming feelings on how badly the entire thing was handled from a social engineering point of view. One would believe the various organisations involved would have taken history's lessons to heart. I speak of none other than the latest non-event of this new century – the dreaded Pork Flu. Known by many names, such as swine flu, bacon explosion (due to one of the major unpleasant symptoms), jumping bean fever, H1N1 (the actual scientific designate), and plain old influenza.

Some may say I am being unkind at best or just a total arsehole. To my detractors, as Mayor of Dogtown, I have and had instituted mitigation procedures. Long has Dogtown had plans in place for just such a public health "emergency". Our Dogtown Response to Influenza Plan (DRIP) contains many common sense initiatives. Consultation was had with many a nameless scientist and the occasional minion of bureaucratic orthodoxy. Computer models were created, run, thrown out, remade, thrown out again, and then really good educated guesses substituted for lack of a decent model. The major questions of this study were along the lines of: what are the true effects of mitigation? Which form works best? Do multiple methods have a synergistic effect? How soon does one have to implement mitigation measures? How long may one delay and still have some efficacy? My staff and I delved into all this and more.

One important aspect – something which could trump practically any other mitigation measure – was nearly overlooked. This was proper risk communication to the huddled masses. What is proper risk communication in a public health emergency? I can sum it up in one short sentence: do not lie to the public. Let me expand upon the word "lie". This includes dissembling, exaggeration, pig ignorance of subject matter resulting in unknowingly spreading false information and other forms of intentional or unintentional obfuscation. Give forth facts and make damned sure said facts are correct upon release. Sadly, with this uptick in influenza cases, some major gaffs were made in this department.

There was a general overreaction caused, in part, by several key media outlets. This led to many taking action far beyond what was necessary. Some schools in Dogtown, despite contrary guidance from my office, decided to close when a single suspected case of Pork Trots cropped up. Not only did the school close, but the entire facility was subjected to decontamination. Was this an approved method for this particular virus? Who knows? I cannot find out if they used bleach, phenol, ammonia, or just hot soapy water. Interestingly, a few months earlier, this same school had a few pupils who came down with the measles. Nothing so severe was done. Measles, in terms of an ability to spread through a susceptible population, is the hare to influenza's tortoise. Measles is roughly five to seven times more contagious. Some might argue the pack immunity is much higher for measles than for influenza and thus, even with the higher R_0 , measles is a lesser risk. In the past this was true. Sadly, all it took was one lying son-of-a-dog nameless scientist to create some nice false research saying such things as measles

vaccinations caused any number of bizarre side effects for various cranks to stop vaccinating their pups.

Another gaff was presenting plain filter masks – such as surgical masks and pollen masks – as something useful to prevent infection in healthy individuals. The mask companies certainly shall be sending holiday cards to certain news outlets for boosting their sales. A noted news outlet doctor and pangolin, Dr Brjenay said: "I'd make more money accepting bribes from drug companies than do something responsible like public service". Dr Gundrasakapemapelatonaprong, when asked what he was doing to protect himself while bravely reporting *en cero de suelo*, said three things, two of which were correct. He noted he was being careful to wash his hands and use an alcohol-based hand sanitizing gel (good), distance himself from others (good), and wear a mask. Said mask, of the pollen variety, but coloured a nice medical green for effect, wasn't even being worn during this interview from the trenches. Had he had it on, and if some contagious individual coughed directly into his face, making sure not to hit the enormous gaps on the sides of this non-fitted mask, I suppose it might block the large droplets and keep him safe.

The last major misconception spread around (much faster and far more effective than the actual illness) is that individuals catch and propagate influenza in the winter months due to everyone being cooped up in their dens. This is not the case! Recent research has shown the influenza virus, when not inside a host, prefers a cold and dry environment, not hot and wet. As the summer months develop, this latest outbreak shall die down. There is a concern about resurgence in the fall. I have been assured the vaccine producers are hard at work to make certain the fall's vaccine will have some efficacy against this latest strain.

The absolute worst thing to happen during this public health concern was the dissemination of bad information by a trusted authority, namely the Dogtown Office of Health, DOH, in spite of warnings from my very office, decided to issue a statement so over the top Ms Chuckworthy had to physically restrain me in the Mayor's Den lest I leap forth, grab a Hogheaver, and create a separate public health concern. DOH issued a pandemic warning, stating the outbreak of H1N1 was a threat to all sentient. This ranked high on a top ten list of worst risk communications ever, beating out long favourites such as "Don't Panic!" and "So this is it, we're going to die".

While the hard work of public health certainly kept this (and other seasonal) influenza outbreak from becoming serious, I do request the next time (and we all know the time is coming) a little more substantive facts be reported by trusted news outlets and a downplay on the sensationalism. This crisis has certainly kept me from discussing some other pet projects, including getting the detector community to actually think about chemical and biological background. Time is short, however, and I must go and attempt my own personal bit of influenza mitigation – resignations at DOH.

Till next I poke my head up.

Gabriel Cinomis