

1 in 6 public health workers unlikely to respond in pandemic flu emergency

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Approximately 1 in 6 public health workers said they would not report to work during a pandemic flu emergency regardless of its severity, according to a survey led by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. The findings are a significant improvement over a 2005 study conducted by the same research team, in which more than 40 percent of public health employees said they were unlikely to report to work during a pandemic emergency. The new study suggests ways for improving the response of the public health workforce. The results are published in the July 24 edition of the journal *PLoS ONE*.

"Employee response is a critical component of preparedness planning, yet it is often overlooked. Our study is an attempt to understand the underlying factors that determine an employee's willingness to respond in an emergency," said Daniel Barnett, MD, MPH, lead author of the study and assistant professor in the Department of Environmental Health Sciences at the Bloomberg School of [Public Health](#). "Overall, 16 percent of the workers surveyed said they would not report regardless of the severity of the outbreak."

The online survey was conducted among 1,835 public [health workers](#) in Minnesota, Ohio and West Virginia from November 2006 to December 2007. The survey analysis was based on the Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM), which postulates that willingness to follow instructions in an emergency is based on an individual's perception of a threat's validity and belief that the actions taken can be feasibly accomplished and will have a positive impact on the threat. According to the survey,

public health workers who were both "concerned" about the threat posed by a pandemic, and who were "confident" that they could fulfill their response roles and that their roles would have a meaningful impact on the situation, were 31 times more likely to respond to work in an emergency than those who perceived the threat low and had low levels of confidence. Workers whose perception of the threat was "low" but who strongly believed in the efficacy of their job were 18 times more likely to say they would respond compared to those in the "low threat/low efficacy" group.

"We found belief in the importance of one's work was strongly associated with a willingness to report to work in an [emergency](#). Our results could help preparedness planners to identify workforce needs and develop strategies for improving worker response," co-author said Ran Balicer, MD, PhD, MPH, senior lecturer in the Epidemiology Department at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel, and Joint Editor of the Israeli Ministry of Health Pandemic Preparedness Plan.

"This study is important in that it both documents the problem and points the way towards specific interventions—those that increase both concern and confidence—to increase willingness to respond," said Jonathan Links, PhD, professor in the Bloomberg School's Department of Environmental Health Sciences and director of the Public Health Preparedness Programs.

Source: Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health ([news](#) : [web](#))

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