

East Valley Tribune, Gilbert News  
Gilbert on guard against bird flu  
By Beth Lucas, Tribune - July 12, 2006

Small bottles of hand sanitizer were distributed to more than 60 statewide government and industry officials Tuesday — as a way to illustrate one way the public can help limit a spread of an avian flu outbreak.

Officials gathered at the Gilbert Fire Department amphitheater to discuss how to respond to the devastating effects such an outbreak could bring in losses of life and damage to the economy.

Cities and towns need to know how to clean up contaminated birds, and how to set up medical centers and even morgues in the event of a major outbreak, said Gunnar Kuepper, president of the western region of International Association of Emergency Managers.

Kuepper was invited by Gilbert's emergency manager Sheri Gibbons to come from Los Angeles to speak about the possibility of an outbreak.

"The awareness for the public in regards to communicable diseases should be on the rise," he said. "People in the United States are a resource. People are not just victims."

Communication with the public to dispel rumors and provide information would be key in an outbreak, Kuepper said. If the illness mirrors past flu pandemics, 10 percent of the population could be ill or affected, which would flood hospitals and take up almost half of municipal emergency departments' resources. It also would mean thousands out sick, which could lead to grocery stores running temporarily out of food, or ATMs out of money, he said.

"We should all be able to mitigate the problem," Gilbert Fire Chief Collin DeWitt said of the town's nearly finalized response plan, "though we definitely can't cure it."

While local government must be ready, people need to also be ready to help each other if a worst-case scenario comes true, Kuepper said. And government agencies may need to make difficult decisions about quarantines or required vaccinations, depending on what is realistic.

"A big component is not only educating our employees, but our citizenry," said Marc Eisen, homeland security director for Scottsdale.

For information on avian flu, visit [www.pandemic.flu](http://www.pandemic.flu), [www.who.int](http://www.who.int), [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), [www.oie.int](http://www.oie.int) or [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org).

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