



Reply To:

Wednesday, August 19, 2009

Iowa Dept. of Public Health  
Thomas Newton-Director  
Lucas State Office Building  
Des Moines, IA 50319-0075

RE: Pandemic Flu

As you know, this nation is taking important steps to prepare for the possibility of a pandemic flu outbreak. History teaches us that pandemics can be characterized by rapid worldwide spread, overloaded health care systems, inadequate medical supplies, and economic and social disruption.

Pandemics are also unpredictable. Historically, the Federal government, as well as the State of Iowa, have made a number of assumptions that need to be taken into account to facilitate the planning efforts of key entities and their infrastructures.

Drinking water and wastewater utilities are such a critical sector. Their role in American communities and their continued operation during a pandemic must be assured. The water sector in Iowa is concerned that critical water utility operational personnel have not been adequately considered in recent guidelines for pandemic response. It is important to note that clean water is the foundation of public health. As such, continuous operation of water and wastewater facilities is fundamental to restoring health to a community during any phase of a pandemic or disaster. Without adequate quantity and quality of water, a community cannot recover. Aside from the multiple hospitals and healthcare providers in the various communities throughout the state, all critical infrastructure and first-line responders rely on clean water as the foundation of public health. In this sense, the water sector provides a lifeline to support and sustain both emergency and everyday functions. It is sometimes easy to forget the importance of the service that the water sector provides, because during normal day-to-day operations, these services go on seamlessly. This may not be the case during a full-scale pandemic, without your assistance in providing us with the necessary vaccines to enable our most critical workforce to perform their essential functions.

While we understand that certain guidelines may be handed down from the federal level for distribution of the initial wave of H1N1 vaccines, we look to our public health officials in Iowa to make the best decision, as it relates to matters of our state. We strongly feel that critical operational personnel within the water utility sector should be recognized as first responders in dealing with public health issues that affect the entire state or region, as they are under federal law. Specifically:

- Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8 – National Preparedness, defines “first responder” as those individuals who, in the early stages of an incident, are responsible for the protection and preservation of life, property, evidence, and environment, including emergency response providers as defined in section 2 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (6 U.S.C. 101), as well as emergency management, public health, clinical care, public works, and other skilled support personnel (such as equipment operators) that provide immediate support services during prevention, response, and recovery operations.
- 6 U.S.C. 101 – The term “emergency response providers” includes Federal, State, and local governmental and nongovernmental emergency public safety, fire, law enforcement, emergency response, emergency medical (including hospital emergency facilities), and related personnel, agencies, and authorities.

We believe that this should logically classify water sector first responders (related to critical infrastructure – emergency services sector personnel) as in the first tier of vaccination target groups.

It is our understanding that while federal guidelines may exist, it is ultimately the responsibility of the Iowa Department of Public Health to decide on any final prioritization and allocation of vaccines. We understand and acknowledge the limitations on the supply of vaccine, given the reported difficulty in its manufacture. However, we would like stress that the water sector is every bit as critical to the continued operation of our communities as police, fire, and other emergency personnel.

We look forward to answering any questions that you may have.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Wilson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tim Wilson  
Chair  
Iowa Section American Water Works Association