**Crimson Contagion**

The Crimson Contagion 2019 Functional Exercise is a multi-state exercise conducted to simulate a response to a hypothetical pandemic caused by a novel influenza A (H7N9) virus. The exercise aimed to assess the readiness and response capabilities of various government agencies, organizations, and stakeholders in the face of a pandemic threat. This series focuses on the coordination and collaboration among various federal agencies, with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) playing a central role. This projection hinged on critical assessments regarding the preparedness levels of hospitals and cities across the nation, aiming to gauge their ability to confront and manage hypothetical outbreaks. The exercise is a comprehensive simulation involving multiple agencies, including HHS, CDC, DHS/FEMA, and others. Its purpose was to assess the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms, identify gaps in communication, and evaluate the overall readiness of the involved agencies to respond to a public health crisis. This exercise highlights several challenges, such as a lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities between HHS/ASPR and the CDC, uncertainty in how agencies like the Office of Personnel Management would coordinate, and a general lack of specificity in roles for various agencies during a pandemic response. These challenges point to potential shortcomings in the existing coordination frameworks and call for improvements in interagency communication. Throughout the exercise, it became evident that the existing vaccine distribution system required enhancement to achieve greater efficiency and speed. A critical challenge identified was the insufficient capacity for vaccine production, highlighting the necessity for increased manufacturing capabilities. Coordination among federal, state, and local agencies emerged as a pivotal factor for effective pandemic management. The exercise underscored the importance of clear and consistent public messaging to ensure the dissemination of accurate information and promote adherence to health guidelines. Furthermore, gaps in workforce viability and healthcare capacity were identified, emphasizing the need for bolstering resources in these areas. Supply chain management and resource allocation also presented challenges, emphasizing the importance of strategic planning and execution. While the exercise was a simulation designed to test and evaluate the response to a pandemic, it was intended to simulate a realistic pandemic situation to assess the preparedness and response capabilities of various organizations. The complexity of interagency coordination, especially in a crisis scenario, is realistic, and the exercise likely aimed to simulate conditions as close to reality as possible. One agency cited in the exercise report for its performance was the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC played a central role in coordinating public health responses, including surveillance, communication, and guidance during the exercise. The CDC's ability to conduct epidemiological investigations and provide guidance was considered a crucial aspect of the response. The overall key findings are: Insufficient federal funding for a severe influenza pandemic, coupled with confusion regarding the application of the Defense Production Act, revealed challenges. Additionally, the existing medical supply chain and production capacity were inadequate to meet the demand, emphasizing a global manufacturing incapacity to satisfy domestic needs for personal protective equipment and ancillary supplies (‘Crimson Contagion 2019’ Simulation Warned of Pandemic Implications in the US, 2020). There is no evidence that a final report ever came out of the simulation exercise report, but the exercise shows that the Trump administration modeled a global pandemic and predicted many of the same problems that the U.S. had during the peak of COVID-19 (What Last Year’s Government Simulation Predicted About Today’s Pandemic, 2020). The crimson contagion exercise took place in 2019 and was focused on a hypothetical H7N9 influenza scenario. The exercise provided valuable insights into the challenges and response strategies in a pandemic, which could have informed general preparedness. Given that COVID-19 is a different virus (SARS-CoV-2), the exercise's specific policies and recommendations might not be directly applicable to the COVID-19 response. It was a flu in the simulation case and a different virus in the case of COVID-19 (What Last Year’s Government Simulation Predicted About Today’s Pandemic, 2020). The response to COVID-19 involved a complex interplay of various factors, including international coordination, the development of vaccines, testing and contact tracing, healthcare capacity, and public health measures. If the lessons learned from the Crimson Contagion exercise had been effectively applied, it might have improved aspects of the U.S. response to COVID-19. For example, the exercise highlighted the need for efficient vaccine distribution and clear public messaging, which could have helped expedite vaccination efforts and enhance public compliance with preventive measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. In summary, the exercise aimed to evaluate and improve the coordination efforts among federal agencies in response to a simulated influenza pandemic. The identified challenges, collaboration efforts, and proposed objectives indicate a comprehensive approach to enhancing the effectiveness of interagency coordination in the face of public health crises. If the lessons learned from this exercise were integrated into policies and practices, it could contribute to more efficient responses to future pandemics.