

STATEWIDE MEDICAL AND HEALTH EXERCISE PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



PURPOSE

This document contains a list of frequently asked questions about the California Statewide Medical and Health Exercise Program, organized by category. This is a living document, and is updated periodically on the website to include new questions submitted on the website or on the annual survey. Any additional questions can be submitted on the “Contact Us” page on the SWMHE website, <http://www.swmhe.com>.

NEW TO THE SWMHE

Where do I start?

- If your organization is new to the Statewide Medical and Health Exercise (SWMHE) program, please take a few minutes to get familiar with the website layout. All the areas of the website can be accessed from the home page (<http://www.swmhe.com>). The SWMHE program has also created a series of pre-recorded webcasts that review how to access and customize some of the exercise templates. Those can be accessed here: http://www.swmhe.com/2017/resources/getting_started.html
- We recommend that you start by planning with your facility/agency/organization’s emergency preparedness planning team or committee to determine your level of participation in the program. Then ask yourself, what are your objectives for participating in the program (e.g., training? tabletop? full scale exercise? participating with your local jurisdiction? conducting a drill for new staff members?) and what do you need to accomplish?
- There is also a “How to Get Started” Page on our website with some helpful first steps. See the “How to Get Started” link on the homepage: http://www.swmhe.com/2017/resources/getting_started.html

SCENARIOS

Can I change the Scenario?

- The objectives should be driving the scenario. If your organization needs to test capabilities and objectives that would be better met by using a different scenario, please do so. The scenario provided by the exercise planning workgroup is meant to facilitate your exercise planning, but adherence to it is not intended to be an absolute requirement for participation in the exercise. We would suggest that you click on the “Changing the Scenario” document in the “Objectives and Scenario” tab, this gives a document-by-document list and page number for where each template would need to be edited to account for a scenario change.

Why was this scenario chosen?

- The chosen objectives and capabilities were selected by the exercise planning workgroup based on grant requirements, and then incorporated into the five year SWMHE Multi-Year Training and Exercise Plan (MYTEP). Then, based on these objectives and capabilities, the exercise planning team selected a suggested scenario for each year that would focus on these objectives and capabilities. For FY 17-18, the scenario was chosen based on the selected objectives and capabilities from the MYTEP. As always, the exercise is objective-driven, and the scenario may be changed. The MYTEP can be accessed from a link on the SWMHE homepage (www.californiamedicalhealthexercise.com).

Where can I access templates from previous years and previous scenarios?

- There is an “Archives” tab at the top of the SWMHE website, on the grey bar. This page will lead you to previous years’ exercise templates for the various scenarios listed. To receive exercise documents from exercises conducted prior to 2014 please email CAStatewideExercise@cdph.ca.gov, and make sure to indicate the exercise year, phase, and document title in your email.

How can I scale the scenario up or down for my jurisdiction (rural/suburban/urban)?

- Any scenario can be customized to fit the needs of your facility/agency/organization, depending on your knowledge of your local community. All exercises should be based on threats and hazards identified in your local risk assessment. If a suggested scenario is not applicable to your jurisdiction, or not conceived as a likely threat, it is recommended that you alter the scenario or create one that is more applicable.
- If you are located in a small community or rural jurisdiction, you may want to alter the scale of the incident. Instead of a large-scale pandemic, bioterror incident, or

multi-site coordinated terrorist attack, you could replace it with a small number of cases of an emerging infectious disease, or an isolated attack on one area. You can scale the scenario up or down to fit your exercise capability.

- If you are located in a suburban community, you should consider the incorporation of jurisdictional lines into your scenario. Consider scenarios that may affect neighboring jurisdictions and overlap between your jurisdictional lines. How do commuters affect the scenario? Transportation corridors? Tourists?
- In an urban setting, consider the geography and infrastructure involved in the scenario. Consider the “domino effect” that a seemingly isolated incident can have on multiple systems, transportation corridors, events, etc. Scale the scenario accordingly and include details on how the scenario is affecting other areas of your jurisdiction.

USING THE DOCUMENTS/TEMPLATES

When are the materials released for each year?

- Updated materials are released annually by April 1 of each year.

How are the templates created?

- The SWMHE Exercise Planning Workgroup (EPW) meets once a month to review feedback, update materials and update the Multi-Year Training and Exercise Plan (MYTEP) based on new requirements, and provide assistance to local entities as they plan their exercise. Part of the EPW’s task is to create exercise templates that are up-to-date, aligned with Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) guidelines, and inclusive of regulations and statewide emergency response policies. The website is updated each year by April 1 to incorporate planning for that year’s exercise.

How do I create my agency’s exercise objectives?

- The website now has a helpful, pre-recorded webcast on “Customizing the objectives and starting to plan your exercise,” which is available here: [insert link]

How do I customize or write my agency’s exercise scenario, or the Master Scenario Events List (MSEL) and actor cards?

- The website now has a helpful, pre-recorded webcast on “Changing and Developing the Scenario,” which is available here: [insert link], and one on “Customizing the MSEL and Actor Cards,” which is available here: [insert link].
- The Master Scenario Events List (MSEL) serves as a master exercise timeline for exercise staff and planners to utilize both to track exercise progress and to deliver exercise injects to participants to facilitate play. Since this document maps out specific activities that will take place during the exercise, this document

needs to be edited and customized to be specific to the needs of your organization. Work with your exercise planning team to determine the activities that should take place, the expected actions, the timeline, and the injects that need to be delivered to encourage staff to respond. Ensure your exercise objectives are linked to specific MSEL injects and are tested appropriately. Do not show the MSEL to potential exercise participants. Within the SWMHE MSEL template, there are asterisks (*) next to the columns that are recommended to include in your MSEL at a minimum.

- The Actor Cards are an optional tool to utilize if you plan to use artificial patients and/or affected members of the public during your exercise. These can be modified on the excel table provided, and imported into a card format that can be printed and given to an actor, volunteer, or to exercise participants to read. Work with your planning team to determine how many and what type of patients/family members/staff/survivors to utilize during the exercise.
- If you are having difficulties with the format of these templates provided, there are many other MSEL and Actor Card formats available online if you search for other exercise documents and samples. For example, sample exercise documents can be found in HSEEP, through the Radiological Injury Treatment Network (RITN), or through most state's emergency management agencies.
- If you are having difficulty with the mail merge feature on your actor cards, there are many helpful mail merge tutorials available online tailored to your computer type (PC, Mac) and version of Word.

What does the grey, bracketed text mean?

- Grey, bracketed text refers to any element of the document that should be customized for the local facility/agency/organization or jurisdiction. For example, if a sentence reads, "the second incident occurs at [insert location]", the text should be customized for local needs, for example: "the second incident occurred at the Theodore Roosevelt Academy on 6th Street"
- Tip: To quickly customize a document, you may want to do a "Ctrl + F" to search for all the brackets "[" in the document.

What do I use the Organizational Self-Assessments for?

- These are optional, supplementary resources that can be used to evaluate current emergency response policies and procedures in your facility/agency/organization. These assessments do not need to be submitted to anyone or any agency. Rather, they are an internal tool to evaluate current gaps in policies, plans, training, or exercises to help identify potential objectives for the SWMHE.
- The website currently has self-assessments for three categories of organizations: clinical (hospitals, community clinics, long term care, dialysis, etc.), community preparedness (local EMS agencies, public health, social services, nonprofits,

etc.), and public safety (police, fire, emergency management, etc.).

- The website has a version of the assessment that is general to overall emergency preparedness efforts, as well as a version specific to the suggested scenario.

How can I incorporate video injects/video resources into my exercise?

- Videos are a wonderful resource to use to engage staff and exercise participants during a training or exercise. Video elements can lend a sense of “realism” to the scenario and help participants visualize operations.
- Before conducting a large exercise, you may want to show your staff videos online of what a large-scale exercise looks like in a similar environment, especially for staff who may have never participated in an exercise before.
- During the tabletop exercise, video injects or resources can be used to begin each “module” or discussion section. These could be videos available online from a similar incident that has occurred in the past (e.g., news footage of a previous pandemic influenza outbreak such as H1N1) or artificially created and scripted videos for the purpose of the exercise (e.g., a fake newscast about an earthquake occurring near your facility).
- During a functional or full-scale exercise, you can use videos to prompt specific injects in your Master Scenario Events List (MSEL). A video could be shown to participants during a pre-exercise player briefing or during the exercise in a briefing or through a link distributed via email.
- You can find some video resources for each year’s suggested scenario either on the Scenario Summary document or the “Resources” button available from the homepage (<http://www.swmhe.com>).

PARTICIPATION

Is participation mandatory?

- No, participation is not mandatory unless it is specifically stated in your annual grant requirements. However, if you are required to conduct exercises annually, this program can serve as a unique opportunity to meet those requirements.

What agencies typically participate?

- The most common participants in this exercise are local public health departments and hospitals. However, jurisdictions are increasingly involving their EMS agencies, emergency management departments, police departments, fire departments, and other health care providers (especially members of local health care coalitions) including community clinics, long term care facilities, surgical

centers, etc. Anyone can participate.

How do I encourage other agencies in my area to participate?

- If other agencies in your area are required to conduct exercises annually, this program can serve as a unique opportunity for them to not only meet those requirements, but also to train with community response partners at the same time. If they are not required to participate, the exercise can still serve as valuable training for their agency staff on how to work with community partners in various scenarios. Sometimes, altering the scenario to incorporate other agencies' participation can also help encourage them to participate. For example, if you would like the local police department to participate, use a scenario that would realistically include a significant police component, such as security and/or evacuation. If you would like Animal Care and Control to participate, ensure the scenario includes components of animal emergency response, etc.

Do I have to do my exercise on the day of the SWMHE in November, or can I change the date?

- All participants can conduct their exercises on any day they choose. The advantage of participating on the day of the SWMHE in November is that the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the Emergency Medical Services Authority (EMSA) will activate their Medical and Health Coordination Center (MHCC) and participate as well, giving locals an opportunity to submit resource requests, situation reports, etc. However, if you need to change the date, advise your local community partners and jurisdiction of why you would prefer another date. The jurisdiction may be able to work with you and ensure that your community is participating on the same day. Depending on the size of your exercise, you may also want to alert CDPH that you are planning to conduct the exercise on another day, and they may be able to support your resource requests and situation reports during that time.

Do I have to do both a tabletop and a functional exercise to participate?

- No. Every element of the SWMHE Program is optional.

How do I evaluate/document my exercise?

- There is information in the Exercise Evaluation Guide (EEG) templates on exercise evaluation, available on the "Phase III: Tabletop Exercise," and "Phase IV: Functional Exercise" tabs from the homepage (www.californiamedicalhealthexercise.com). Overall, assigning certain staff to be exercise evaluators will help ensure progress towards exercise objectives is adequately recorded for future use and reference. Participant Feedback Forms, evaluator notes, Exercise Evaluation Guides, and notes from the post-exercise Hot Wash and/or debrief with exercise staff can be combined and compiled into

an After Action Report (AAR). There is an AAR template on the website for both a tabletop and a functional exercise, available on the “Phase III: Tabletop Exercise,” and “Phase IV: Functional Exercise” tabs from the homepage (www.californiamedicalhealthexercise.com). The AAR will help to summarize the strengths, areas for improvement, and next steps based on the exercise.

- If you want to learn more about exercise evaluation, you can go to the FEMA.gov website, and click on the “HSEEP” tab, to view the HSEEP manual. Chapter 5 of that manual addresses the EEGs and how to develop them. There are also many additional sections within HSEEP on exercise evaluation to help guide you.
- In terms of documenting an exercise, the Exercise Director, Senior Controller, or Lead Evaluator should collect all completed forms and documents after the exercise to compile as part of the AAR. These forms could include Incident Command System (ICS) forms, resource requests, situation reports, incident action plans, sign-in sheets, timesheets, and more. Photos and video footage of the exercise can be another helpful way to document the exercise and may be valuable tools for use in future trainings.

Can I use the templates provided on the website directly, or do I have to wait for my county or jurisdiction’s templates to be released?

- It does not matter if your local jurisdiction is designing their own templates for the exercise in your area, you are still free to use the website templates if they are useful to you, and customize them specifically for your needs.. You should collaborate with your local jurisdiction to make sure you are able to participate meaningfully with them, but you are still welcome to use these templates if they work for you. Your jurisdiction may be developing templates that are customized to your local area, so you will want to inquire whether or not they recommend using their customized templates instead.

I have a new piece of equipment I’d like to test, can I use it within this exercise?

- Yes, you can always add to the exercise to make it work for you. Examine the equipment, look at your Master Scenario Events List, and include an inject that causes your staff to use that piece of equipment. For example, if they need training on a new generator, make sure there is an inject or event somewhere in the exercise that would require them to use the new generator. You may want to discuss how to use it during your tabletop exercise as well, or any pre-exercise training.

Where can I find information about CDPH or CalOES’ planned activities for the exercise in November?

- You can submit questions on each year’s exercise directly to CAStatewideExercise@cdph.ca.gov

What California Health Alert Network (CAHAN) alerts can I expect during the exercise?

- CAHAN refers to the California Health Alert Network; California's web-based information and communications system available on a 24/7/365 basis for the distribution of health alerts, dissemination of prevention guidelines, coordination of disease investigation efforts, preparedness planning, or other initiatives. CAHAN alerts are often used during the SWMHE program to test communications. More information on CAHAN can be found at: <http://www.bepreparedcalifornia.ca.gov/CDPHPrograms/PublicHealthPrograms/EmergencyPreparednessOffice/CAHAN/Pages/CAHAN.aspx>
- Each year may vary, but typically CDPH and EMSA's Medical and Health Coordination Center (MHCC) will send out at least two CAHAN alerts – one to announce the start of the exercise at the MHCC, and one to announce the end of the exercise at the MHCC. If your jurisdiction is participating in other elements of play with the MHCC (such as joint conference calls) your jurisdiction may receive more.

Do I need to submit my After Action Report (AAR) from this exercise to CDPH and EMSA?

- No.

MYTEP AND REGIONAL FOCUS

What is the MYTEP?

- The SWMHE Multi-Year Training and Exercise Plan (MYTEP) is a strategic outline of the chosen objectives and capabilities selected by the exercise planning workgroup based on grant requirements for the next five years of the program. Based on these objectives and capabilities, the exercise planning workgroup selects a suggested scenario for each year that would focus on these objectives and capabilities. As always, the exercise is objective-driven, and the scenario is optional. The MYTEP can be accessed from a link on the SWMHE homepage.

What is it based on?

- The SWMHE Exercise Planning Workgroup has focused the SWMHE program priorities for the next five years on the top priority Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) and Hospital Preparedness Program (HPP) capabilities identified by local jurisdictions through annual surveys. Many local jurisdictions have already developed their own MYTEPs according to their needs and priorities, which may or may not overlap with the capabilities identified in this

plan. In order to ensure as much overlap as possible, CDPH and EMSA released a survey in July of 2015 to gather feedback on the top priority capabilities (PHEP, HPP, and National Core Capabilities) for 2016 and 2017. Based on the feedback received, as well as funding requirements, requests for specialized topics, and subject matter expertise, this five-year plan was crafted to achieve the top priority capabilities in 2016, 2017, and 2018, and to focus on the rest of the capabilities for 2019 and 2020. In this way, all PHEP and HPP capabilities are tested at least once in the five-year period (according to requirements) and local jurisdictions can concentrate on priority capabilities before moving on to others that may be less of an immediate need.

What does the Regional Focus refer to on the MYTEP? What does this mean for my region?

- The Regional Focus refers to a concerted effort that will be made each year for CDPH and EMSA to focus on interacting with the selected region during the exercise. The region(s) identified for each year are expected to coordinate a regional exercise planning effort. The counties within the region do not all have to play to the same exercise scenario. However, the goal is to come together to conduct regional planning for the SWMHE. CDPH and EMSA may work with the selected region ahead of time to help facilitate joint planning efforts. If you are a local healthcare provider within the selected region, we recommend reaching out to your local HPP or PHEP coordinator for more information.

SWMHE WEBSITE TECHNICAL ISSUES

Is there a search function?

- Not currently, but it is under development. The website is scheduled to be updated as part of the 2018 program.

Where do I go if I have technical problems with the website?

- All technical questions should be emailed to the CDPH Emergency Preparedness Office at CAStatewideExercise@cdph.ca.gov