

Closed POD Partner Program: Frequently Asked Questions



Q: When would businesses be asked to dispense medications at our own facility?

A: The only time the Local Health Department would ask businesses or partner organizations to dispense medications to employees, their families and/or clients without medical oversight would be in the very rare event that there is a great risk to the whole population and preventive medications need to be taken immediately. This also assumes that the whole region or state is affected and that is why we can not get enough licensed medical personnel to help us dispense medications quickly enough.

Q: Are the Local Health Department staff going to run the Closed POD to dispense medications?

A: No. Local Health Departments may send a designee to your site to deliver medications, forms and protocols. In some jurisdictions, this person may also provide a brief “Just-In-Time” training to the staff you identified to coordinate the dispensing clinic. However, the Local Health Department designee will then have to leave and go on to bring medications and a brief training to all the other businesses, health clinics and disaster service worker agencies that are doing the same thing. Your organization is responsible for providing staff and plans to run your Closed POD.

Q: Are we required to recruit medical staff to dispense medications to our employees?

A: No. During a declared public health emergency if a life-threatening event has occurred and the whole County, Region or State population needs to receive prophylaxis (preventive medications) in a brief period of time, the Governor is expected to waive dispensing regulations to allow non-medical staff to help dispense medications.

Q: Where do we refer employees if they have medical problems or medical questions about the medications we are handing out?

A: The Local Health Department should provide you with scripted questions and answers and procedures to follow (you will be educated on this process in more detail). Those who are not sure about whether or not they should take the medication will be given the life-saving medications to take home with them and told to consult with their own doctor.

Q: Will people be allowed to pick up medications for their family?

A: It depends on the procedures of the organization that has agreed to be a Closed POD Partner.

Q: Are the medications in unit dosages?

A: Yes. You will be given the medications already packaged with clear instructions and precautions just like any other medication received at a local pharmacy.

Q: Do you provide any kind of injectables?

A: No. The Local Health Department would only activate Closed PODs in an extremely widespread event where we have emergency medications available in the form of pills or tablets. Using the forms and instructions provided by the Local Health Department, your staff will be able to reasonably dispense the medications to other employees, their families and/or clients.

Q: Could someone be turned down for medication during the dispensing process?

A: Most likely not. Each Closed POD would receive guidance about the medications developed by the Local Health Department, the State Department of Public Health and/or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Dispensing staff would provide pre-prepared written information about the reason for the emergency medications, benefits and possible side effects of taking the medication to all employees. Even in an emergency, each person can make the decision whether or not to take the medication. There may be some employees who have contraindications to both drugs offered, in which case they should be referred to their own doctor or a public POD for further consultation.

Q: Are there multiple drugs in case I am allergic to one of the medications being dispensed?

A: Yes. Depending on the situation (example: in the case of, an aerosolized anthrax release) we will provide more than one type of antibiotic

Q: How will my employees who are dispensing be protected from medical liability?

A: It varies between States and Counties for blanket protection. In a declared emergency, a Governor can waive certain scopes of practice that would affect those without medical licenses and may allow for laypeople to dispense medications.

Q: What are the planning parameters for how large the release is and when the Local Health Department will provide prophylaxis (preventative medications) to everyone?

A: It will depend upon the situation at the time and the level of immediate risk to the population. Currently, local health department planning efforts are based on a worst-case scenario where it is necessary to dispense medications immediately to the entire population.

Q: What happens if someone overdoses on the medication because “if one is good more must be better”?

A: That is always a possibility when someone leaves a pharmacy or dispensing site with their medication. Patients will be given instructions on how much medication to take and when you should take them (this will be provided by the health department). It is up to the person to follow the directions.

Q: Does the Local Public Health Department have a plan for when the electricity and/or phones are out?

A: Yes. The Local Health Departments prepare for all hazards. It is clearly a challenge but the Local Health Department is required to address these issues if life-threatening events should occur and we must respond to save lives.

Q: How much time is expected for training for Closed POD planning and time needed to set up a dispensing site at our facility?

A: It varies from organization to organization, but, as an example, a basic workshop could take about 2 hours. An additional 2-4 hours would be needed if you would like to do a functional drill. The amount and type of training is up to you and your organization.

Q: We are only open Monday through Friday, 8 am to 5 pm at our company. Are we expected to get medications to employees if something happens after hours even if many employees live out of town?

A: The goal is get the medications to the public as quickly as possible. The Closed POD model is primarily to provide emergency medications on-site during normal business hours. However, if an emergency of this scale were to happen after hours, you would have the option of opening your site or having staff or clients go to Public Dispensing Sites closest to their homes.

Q: What if there is Quarantine where people are located?

A: It would be impossible to quarantine a whole county. The Local Health Department will focus on isolating small numbers of individuals who are ill with a life-threatening contagious illness and separating or quarantining their close contacts for a limited period of time to ensure they don't become ill and contagious, too. If more than one person is ill in a facility with a life-threatening contagious illness for which there is no treatment or prophylaxis, then the facility might be quarantined for a limited period of time. In almost all cases, persons can be quarantined at home or at other more comfortable locations.

Q: How many different types of Biological Agents are being prepared for?

A: There are 10 life-threatening biological agents identified which counties are required to have response plans in order to rapidly contain their spread. Public health emergency response systems are also scalable to adapt to other unknown agents or new emerging infections that may arise.

Q: Are Closed Points of Dispensing only for employees or is the public allowed to come to those locations too?

A: This is an organizational choice; each Closed POD Partner chooses whether they want to open for the public or just focus on their employees, their families and/or their clients. It is not an expectation of Closed POD Partner programs for identified partners to open their doors to the public.

Q: If I decide to open my business to the public, how long am I obligated to be running for the public?

A: There is no time limit obligation for public use once a business decides to be a public point of dispensing site. The decision to open to the public can be identified when you sign-up to be a Closed POD Partner and will be an individual choice of the organization but most public PODs will be open until the overall needs of the population have been met.

Q: If our company chooses to allow the public to come and get emergency medications at our location, how would we get all these additional medications?

A: Once you become a Closed POD Partner you will be given a number and person to contact at the Local Health Department. In the event of a declared public health emergency, you would confirm that the amount of medication we have on file is correct or adjust that number as needed. The Local Health Department would then deploy the supplies and medications you need for your employees and their families and additional medications as needed to help us provide medications to the public if you choose to do so. If you are a public POD, the local health department would likely supply you with additional staff and resources as well.

Q: What is the cost of the Closed POD Program? How can we ensure that it remains as budget neutral as possible? Will Closed POD Partners be reimbursed for their response efforts in an emergency?

A: The Closed POD program should be little to no cost to your organization. It will mostly involve staff time for training and possibly getting supplies ready. Since the Closed POD Training is designed to be integrated into your current emergency plans and trainings it should not require much additional staff time and typically most of the supplies needed for a Closed POD are easily accessible in business environments. With regards to reimbursement for response after an event, you will need to work closely with the local health department to fill out any forms that need to be completed and turned into the State or Federal government. This includes turning in sign-in sheets, inventory forms and any other information that is needed.