

# Pandemic Preparedness Plan Exercise Program

## Guide for controllers/facilitators

### Introduction

This guide is designed to assist the designated controller/facilitator in the execution of the tabletop exercises provided in the Pandemic preparedness checklist exercise toolkit.

Specific controller responsibilities before, during, and after an exercise are presented in detail.

The purpose of this guide is to:

- define the overall organization of an exercise
- explain the roles and responsibilities of the controller, before during and after the exercise;

### Exercise organization

There are four different kinds of participants in an exercise- Controllers, Evaluators, Observers and Players. Controllers and Evaluators are Exercise Control Staff, Observers and Players are considered participants.

#### *Exercise control staff*

**Controller** – The controller is responsible for the presentation of the initial narrative and the delivery of injects to the players. The controller also may need to act as a mediator if discussion becomes heated or counter-productive. The controller is responsible for not divulging scenario information to players before the start of the exercise.

**Evaluator** – The evaluator does not interact with the players in any way during the exercise. The task of the evaluator is to document and evaluate player performance against the expected/desired behaviours as well as monitor the performance and adequacy of facilities, including support from staff, systems and supporting documentation. The evaluator is responsible for not divulging scenario information to players before the start of the exercise.

#### *Exercise participants*

**Observers** - Observers may be present during the exercise for educational or official purposes. Observers should not interact with players, contribute information or opinions, or interfere with the exercise in any way. All questions or comments from Observers should be directed to the Controller. Observers may have prior knowledge of the scenario, and as such, it should be communicated to them that they also are responsible for not divulging scenario information to players before the start of the exercise.

**Players** – The role of the player in a tabletop exercise is to explain what actions would be taken in response to the scenario and injects put before them. The players should not have any prior knowledge of the scenario or any of the behaviours expected of them before the exercise.

#### *The role of the controller*

Controllers play a crucial role throughout the exercise process. The primary responsibility of the controller is to maintain continuity of the scenario and control of the exercise. The Controller maintains the sequence of events; controls the flow of exercise injects and is responsible for the overall conduct of the exercise. Controllers are in a unique position to view exercise play as it happens and offer feedback to the evaluator on what is observed. While the controller does not need to be a technical expert in the area of the exercise, he or she should have some knowledge of the subject and have access to a technical expert who is not a player in the exercise should advice be needed. Exercises can have more than one controller.

Controllers provide scenario information to the players as scheduled and necessary and may be tasked to inject contingency measures to keep the exercise on track with the scenario and on the exercise timeline.

Specifically, controllers should do the following:

#### **Prior to the exercise**

- Review appropriate emergency plans, procedures, and documents
- Review appropriate exercise materials
- Attend required meeting and training sessions

#### **During the exercise**

- Conduct the exercise by providing scenario information to the players;
- Allow freedom of player decisions and actions to demonstrate exercise objectives and response capabilities
- Avoid leading or prompting the decision making processes or actions of the players
- Prevent evaluators and observers from having any interaction with the players
- Be prepared to suspend exercise activities should it become necessary for technical or safety reasons.

On the day of the exercise, the Controller should have reviewed their instructions and be comfortable with the scenario, guided discussion questions, and exercise procedure. The Controller will be largely responsible for controlling the pace of the exercise through the delivery of additional questions if the exercise begins to stray away from the objectives during the course of play.

#### **Post-Exercise Activities**

The two primary post-exercise duties for controllers are facilitation of players "hot wash" debriefings immediately following the exercise and participation in the exercise evaluation process. Controllers typically provide input to the critique and evaluation process because of their familiarity with the exercise activities and player actions.

#### **Review of the Exercise**

A debriefing is conducted after the exercise to provide participants (players, controllers, and evaluators) the opportunity to identify and discuss findings (both positive and negative).

#### **Immediate Post Exercise Review (IPER)**

This debriefing (often referred to as a 'Hot Wash') occurs immediately after the exercise and is facilitated by the controller and evaluator team. The purpose of the Hot Wash is to provide a forum for constructive feedback on the exercise by the players.

The identification of both positive and negative criticism provides a starting point for improving response capabilities. This is an opportunity for players to discuss their responses and their own perspectives on the activities and events. Controllers may discuss significant observations. Evaluators should document the observations and feedback from the players. These observations and feedback will form part of the Evaluator's final report on the outcomes of the exercise.

Generally, the controllers facilitate the exercise debriefing while the evaluators take notes. It is important that the players' input be included so an effective and complete evaluation is accomplished. In a tabletop exercise, this can generally be accomplished in one meeting, however, in a more complex exercise with participants at more than one site, a series of debriefings may need to take place in order to include all players.

The Hot Wash should be performed as soon after the exercise as possible, so that exercise activities are still fresh in the minds of all involved. It is important however to take possible "exercise fatigue" into consideration when scheduling the session.

Controllers and evaluators should not provide the players with details of any deficiencies or findings during this debrief. Controller input should be limited to feedback concerning the actual event scenario, as opposed to the outcome of exercise.

### ***Presenting Scenario Information***

A tabletop exercise is not a full scale simulation. Players will explain the actions they would take according to the scenario and injects, however they do not actually perform those actions. For example, in the event of an outbreak, a country would normally notify WHO. During the exercise, they will not contact WHO, but will report that they would do so.

During the course of the exercise, discussion can veer off track. There can be a fine line between a spirited discussion and a breakdown of productive exploration. It is the responsibility of the controller, in consultation with the evaluator to determine when and how to take measures to bring the group back on track. This may involve changes to an inject, acceleration of the timeline from the original event list or even the entire elimination of an inject or series of injects.

### ***Suspension or Termination of an Exercise***

#### **Suspension**

If an unidentified or questionable situation arises that may affect the participants, a controller may suspend play immediately. Play may be restarted if the situation is resolved. If the exercise is suspended, the controllers will instruct the players to stop all activities but to remain in place pending further instructions.

In the event of a real emergency, it is the controller's responsibility to suspend the exercise in the immediate area for which he/she is responsible. An actual emergency always takes precedence over an exercise.

#### **Termination**

In general, an exercise will be terminated when one of the following conditions is met.

- An actual emergency occurs.
- Exercise objectives have been met and the pace of play indicates that major events have been drawn to a logical conclusion.
- Enough time has elapsed to allow the objectives to be demonstrated.