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Policy paper

Annex A: about Exercise Cygnus

Updated 5 November 2020

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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-pandemic-preparedness/annex-a-about-exercise-cygnus>

Exercise Cygnus was a cross-government exercise to test the UK's response to a serious influenza pandemic that took place over 3 days in October 2016 and involved more than 950 people.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) (known as the Department of Health at the time) and 12 other government departments, as well as NHS Wales, NHS England (NHS), Public Health England (PHE), local public services, several prisons, and staff from the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland governments took part in the exercise.

The aim was to test systems to the extreme, to identify strengths and weaknesses in the UK's response plans, which would then inform improvements in our resilience.

Exercise Cygnus was not designed to consider other potential pandemics, or to identify what action could be taken to prevent widespread transmission.

Exercise Cygnus identified 4 key learning outcomes:

1. The development of a pandemic 'concept of operations' would assist in managing a cross-government and multi-agency response, ie how government works with responders
2. The introduction of legislative easements would assist with the implementation of measures that might be employed during a pandemic
3. Public reactions in response to a reasonable worst-case pandemic influenza need to be better understood
4. An effective response would require capability and capacity to surge services to meet demand.

Within the 4 key learning outcomes there were 22 recommendations from Exercise Cygnus.

The government accepted all the recommendations from Exercise Cygnus and actions on all 22 recommendations have been taken forward in our pandemic preparedness plans.

These plans, along with expert scientific advice, have been used to inform the UK response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report of this exercise was prepared for DHSC (known as DH at the time) by PHE.

You can read more information on our pandemic preparedness work (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pandemic-flu>).

Accessibility note

The PDF format copy of the document 'Exercise Cygnus Report: Tier One Command Post Exercise Pandemic Influenza 18 to 20 October 2016' is not fully accessible and may not be suitable for all users of assistive technology.

This document was produced for the Department of Health and Social Care in 2017 in an earlier .pdf format and some sections of this report, which was not originally intended for publication, have been redacted in line with requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. An accessible version of this document is being prepared and will be published soon.

Links

- Exercise Cygnus report document

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/927770/exercise-cygnus-report.pdf)

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