



[Aging Services Risk, Quality, & Safety Guidance - Guidance](#)

Ask ECRI: Tabletop Exercises for Outbreak Preparedness

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As the COVID-19 pandemic has spread, organizations have sought guidance on conducting tabletop drills to prepare for outbreaks that now seem likely to reach them. In our response, ECRI recommends several resources that can help organizations conduct drills specific to outbreaks of communicable diseases.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) [requires organizations](#) to conduct annual drills or exercise programs, which ECRI notes can train and prepare employees to respond to a variety of disasters that could challenge the organization. A tabletop exercise, according to CMS, is "led by a facilitator and includes a group discussion, using a narrated, clinically-relevant emergency scenario, and a set of problem statements, directed messages, or prepared questions designed to challenge an emergency plan."

One [sample exercise from the World Health Organization](#) (WHO) describes preparing for an influenza pandemic. It walks organizations through seven steps:

1. Selecting an exercise that will be appropriate for the plan being tested
2. Planning the exercise's key steps
3. Developing the scenario
4. Describing situation-specific variables that can be incorporated into the scenario
5. Planning the evaluation team
6. Staging the exercise
7. Evaluating the drill's outcomes to initiate review and revision of the outbreak plan

The WHO guide includes a sample exercise plan, a sample evaluation plan and checklist, a sample participant feedback form, and a sample exercise scenario.

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene also provides exercise scenarios, which it calls [mystery patient drills](#), for communicable disease preparedness. The agency's resources include an introductory presentation giving an overview of the program and how to conduct the drills, staff training on screening and isolation protocols, a drill overview and checklist, a drill evaluation guide, and an after-action report.

The California Department of Public Health also provides resources for its [Statewide Medical and Health Exercise Program](#), including editable templates for predrill planning, conducting drills, and evaluating drills after they are complete.

More extensive guidance on designing, executing, and evaluating disaster drills is available in the guidance article [Disaster Drills](#).

The recommendations contained in Ask ECRI do not constitute legal advice. Facilities should consult legal counsel for specific guidance and develop clinical guidance in consultation with their clinical staff.

TOPICS AND METADATA



Topics

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