

GOVERNMENT

Scientist's Book Warns of Lethal Emerging Pandemic Viruses

NewsUSA

(NU) - In 1918, a mutated, deadly strain of the "Flu" (or Influenza), swept around the world to cause the third deadliest plague in recorded human history. Published research suggests the final global death toll may have arguably been as high as 100 million. Yet, despite two decades of biologic event preparedness at the cost of well over \$80 billion, the U.S. remains unprepared to handle a flu pandemic of a similar scale if one should occur, contends Dr. Steven Hatfill, a specialist physician and virologist with training in mass casualty management and emergency response.

His view is supported by a National Intelligence Estimate, multiple Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports and testimony, and the recently released new Global Health Security Index by the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.

After more than a decade of study, Dr. Hatfill and his team have published a comprehensive book, "Three Seconds Until Midnight" which revisits the challenges of the 1918 pandemic and highlights the limitations of the current U.S. public health system while offering some possible solutions. With an introduction written by the famous virus-hunter C.J. Peters, MD, the book also delves into the causes and problems caused by the continuing emergence of new human infectious diseases previously unknown to science.

"The overwhelming majority of Americans assume that the CDC and public health authorities will rapidly detect a new outbreak of a lethal infectious disease and quickly respond with a vaccine, drugs, and other measures to contain the event. In reality, none of this is guaranteed," Dr. Hatfill emphasizes.

The latest Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) documents show that in a 1918-type pandemic Influenza event, a minimum of 123 to 125 million Americans will not receive any anti-viral drugs or vaccine until after the peak period of infections and deaths. As these individuals watch some of their neighbors, co-workers, or family members become ill and some die around them, all there will be is government advice to frequently wash their hands, cough or sneeze into their sleeve, and if sick, to stay home from work.

In the book, Dr. Hatfill and his team point out how the U.S. has an insufficient public health workforce and lacks the "surge" medical capacity needed for a lethal pandemic situation and that no programs are currently in place to train



Dr. Steven Hatfill is the author of "Three Seconds Until Midnight"

volunteers on how to safely work in an infectious disease environment.

To decrease hospital overcrowding during a 1918-type pandemic, the DHHS will advise communities to set up Neighborhood Emergency Help Centers to triage which patients can be nursed at home. Yet most adults are uninformed on how to care for ill family members if they contract a contagious and possibly lethal infection, and entire households will become ill, Dr. Hatfill says. Historically, the poor, socially disadvantaged urban communities will have the highest infection, hospitalization, and death rates.

The major problems in pandemic preparedness occur with the local city authorities who are largely unprepared to manage an outbreak of a serious lethal infectious disease on a 1918-type scale. This includes developing methods to manage essential worker absenteeism, pre-planning alternate care sites, gross rapid expansion of mortuary capabilities and teaching non-pharmaceutical interventions to the public.

"There are worse viruses in nature than another 1918-type influenza strain. These viruses are simply waiting for the right conditions to adapt and jump species into man," says Dr. Hatfill. "We are the only large mammal to have ever achieved such a high-density global population level and we have no precedent to indicate if we are nearing a threshold or not." As a consequence, we are all participating in a huge on-going biological experiment."

His book outlines the urgent need for a universal flu vaccine and more effective antiviral drugs. It also describes a disaster train concept for improved military support to disadvantaged communities acting in a disaster response mode, similar to the role played by the Armed Forces after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

"Three Seconds Until Midnight" is available for purchase online via Amazon or Kindle.

For more information, visit www.threesecondsuntilmidnight.com.