

## **Governor To Lead Pandemic Flu Summit in Charleston; U.S. HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt Scheduled To Attend Event**

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. - Gov. Joe Manchin today announced that United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Mike Leavitt will visit Charleston on Jan. 12 to address the West Virginia Flu Pandemic Summit, a one-day conference of local and state officials and private sector partners to discuss pandemic flu planning.

The goal of the conference is to raise awareness among state and local leaders about the importance of planning for a potential pandemic flu outbreak or any other health related threat that may appear in the state in the future.

The event, to be held from 1 – 5 p.m. at the University of Charleston's Geary Auditorium, is hosted by the West Virginia Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety and the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources. State Cabinet Secretaries Jim Spears and Martha Walker will also address conference attendees. This is one of the first summits that HHS Secretary Leavitt is attending around the country. He plans to visit all 50 states to draw attention to pandemic flu planning.

"This summit is part of our proactive efforts to be prepared for any type of health or homeland security concern that might come our way," the governor said. "We want to make sure that we are doing everything in our power to identify and secure all of the resources necessary to protect our citizens from any potential harm."

Last month, Secretary Leavitt's agency released a federal plan for preparing to deal with a pandemic influenza. State and local agencies in West Virginia are working on plans specific to their areas. Public health and emergency management agencies share responsibility for this response with hospitals, health care providers, business and other community partners.

A pandemic is caused by a new, widespread flu virus that causes severe illness, to which people have little immunity, and is easily passed from human to human. Currently, attention is focused on avian flu as the possible cause of a pandemic. However, it is important to note that bird flu is not yet easily transmitted from human to human and no human cases have been reported in the United States.

State officials will soon be launching a Web site detailing the state's flu preparations and surveillance information.