



Cities Readiness Initiative (CRI) Postal Plan

Volunteer FAQ

Basic Message:

The United States Postal Service (Postal Service), along with Public Health and Law Enforcement partners, are developing a response plan as part of the nation's emergency preparedness. This plan would use Postal Service volunteer carriers to quickly deliver antibiotics and instruction sheets to residences in the event of large-scale outdoor release of a biological agent (anthrax). Minneapolis and St. Paul are the first US cities where the plan is ready to become operational.

This plan will only be used if local resources were overwhelmed.

The development of this plan is not based on knowledge of any impending release of a biological agent.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Why did the government envision using Postal employees to distribute antibiotics in response to possible mass attacks involving biological agents?

The federal government recognized that the Postal Service could be utilized to distribute medicines which would protect the population against disease. If there were a massive release of anthrax in the air, we could get antibiotics to thousands, or even millions, of people the same way we get the mail to them every day – by using our Postal Service network. The capacity of the Postal Service to deliver quickly to every American household is a unique resource. No other system can match this capacity.

Does development of this plan mean the government has reason to anticipate such an attack?

We have no reason to think such an attack is any more or less likely now than at any other time. However, in today's world such an attack is a possibility, so we need to be as well-prepared as possible to deal with it.

Will mail carriers be mandated to carry out this duty?



No. We are calling for Postal employee volunteers, specifically the city and rural letter carriers and local Postal Service management, who would only be used in the most extreme circumstances, where local public health resources are overwhelmed and lives could be saved by such an urgent measure.

Why should I volunteer?

We believe that Postal personnel will support this because their country, communities, and families can rely on them. Participation by the Postal Service in this effort could potentially prevent the sickness and death of thousands of citizens. Without rapid delivery of medical countermeasures, it is predicted that 90% of those exposed could die.

How will I as a volunteer be protected?

Of primary importance to all parties involved is ensuring Postal volunteer safety through health protection and physical security.

Safety - Volunteers must be medically cleared by Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to take antibiotics and medically cleared by Federal Occupational Health (FOH) to wear a filtering face piece (N-95 mask) for extended periods of time. Please note that these clearances do not involve a physical examination. Screenings are completed via forms you submit to the two safety providers to initiate the screening process; forms and instructions will be handed out to those turning in a USPS application. Once accepted for the Postal Plan, Postal volunteers and their households will get prophylactic antibiotics and appropriate information pre-event. "Household member" is defined as any person having permanent residence with a USPS participant; this does not at this time allow for pets. Personal protective equipment for the volunteers' use, if activated under the Postal Plan, will also be provided pre-event in the form of masks and gloves. Volunteers will be fitted for the proper mask and trained on its use. These safety requirements are based on National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) recommendations. Disposable replacement clothing for elective use after the delivery task is completed will also be provided.

Security - Sufficient local security resources are required to provide one armed security officer for each Postal volunteer delivering these medications to residences. This requirement has to be met for the Postal Service to participate. The Postal Plan will not be implemented if at the time of response security is unavailable. As there are not enough Postal Inspectors or federal law enforcement to provide all the escorts needed, states and localities are required to develop a security plan which the Postal Service and US Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) can review and, if satisfied, agree to before asking for volunteers.



Will I be paid?

Yes. You will be a paid volunteer, which includes reimbursement for participating in the screening process as well as in the event of Postal Plan activation. You are "on-the-clock" during the initial CRI Postal Plan Volunteer Solicitation briefing. If you choose to be considered as a volunteer and undergo the "off-the-clock" antibiotics and mask screening process, you will be paid additional hours at your pay rate (two hours for all those submitting the required forms, and an additional hour for those cleared by FOH to contact MDH to complete the necessary antibiotics screening steps), even if you are ultimately not approved as a volunteer. The mask fit-testing will also be done as an "on-the-clock" activity.

Can I still volunteer if I am on restricted duty?

Yes. Qualification as a volunteer will only be determined by the public health officials responsible for conducting the antibiotics and mask screenings. Any work restrictions you currently may have for day to day work duties do not disqualify you from becoming an approved volunteer.

Why does the Volunteer Application Form ask if I am willing to remove any facial hair for fit-testing or Postal Plan activation?

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) respiratory protection standard (29 CFR 1910.134) applies when wearing respirators. The standard states respirators cannot be worn by employees who have facial hair that comes between the sealing surface of the face piece and the face, or that interferes with valve function. While the standard does not ban beards per se, it does require employers to ensure that bearded employees who are required to wear tight-fitting face pieces trim their beards so that they do not interfere with the sealing surface of the respirator or are not so large that they could interfere with valve function.

How will I know if I am approved as a volunteer?

There are multiple steps in the screening process to determine whether you can be a Postal Plan volunteer. After you receive the forms and follow the instructions for submitting them to both FOH and MDH, the first approval step is the FOH Respiratory Medical Evaluation.

Those applicants utilizing the online FOH form, after completing all questions, will see either a clearance letter, which they may print, or a screen notifying them that the doctor needs to further review their questionnaire. That review will take one business day. The applicant may log back in after one business day to see if they have been cleared or not. During this period FOH staff will review the application to determine pass/fail status. If you make a mistake or think of



additional information you wish to tell the doctor who will be reviewing your online questionnaire, you may do so at the end of the questionnaire where you are asked if you wish to provide any additional information. You may also call and leave a message at 1-800-383-3393.

Volunteers that chose to fill out and mail a paper copy of the FOH Respiratory Medical Evaluation Form will receive pass/fail status through the mail. If you make a mistake or think of additional information you wish to tell the doctor who will be reviewing your hard copy questionnaire, you may call 303-236-3455, ext. 257.

If the FOH screening indicates that you are not an acceptable candidate for this program, you will be notified; no further action is then required on your part. If you are cleared by FOH, MDH will then review the screening forms you already sent to them. MDH will determine whether you can take the antibiotics that are to be pre-placed in the home and work place of qualified volunteers. As part of this screening, you will call into MDH to discuss your submitted form; dates and times will be given when you turn in your USPS application. If MDH determines that you are not an acceptable candidate for this program, you will be notified during the call and afterward by mail; no further action is required on your part.

If you are cleared through the MDH screening process, you will then be scheduled by Postal management for a fit-test and upon successful completion of the fit test you will be a qualified Postal Plan CRI volunteer.

Why is the FOH on-line form preferred over the paper FOH Questionnaire?

The purpose of this screening is to determine your ability to wear a mask. While this form can be filled out on-line or submitted by filling out a paper copy and mailing it back to FOH, the preferred method for submitting this form is via the internet. Should you decide to fill out this form by hand it will require a review by FOH medical personnel and will likely require a follow-up call by FOH to clarify your answers. You are urged to use the on-line form for the following reasons:

- Up to 25% of all forms completed by paper have some item left missing, which doesn't occur on-line
- The greater need for callbacks increases the likelihood of FOH not being able to reach a respondent
- There is no "real time" validation for paper questionnaires as opposed to on-line
- The Web-version is simpler to comprehend and complete, as the single computer source directs respondents through the medical algorithms

We will ask that those who do choose to fill out this form by hand please return it in the pre-addressed envelope no later than 5/6/09. This will allow FOH sufficient



time to review the questionnaire and determine your ability to participate in this program. Those choosing the on-line option will be granted access to the web site from 4/7/09 through 5/22/09 and can fill out the on-line questionnaire there.

What follow-up actions are required once I am accepted as a volunteer?

Training for an actual Postal Plan response will take place once the baseline roster of volunteers is set; for some, this may also involve participating in an exercise of the Postal Plan in a few select ZIP Codes. All volunteers will need to complete an antibiotic kit status form given you by Postal management six months after receipt of the kit, for you to return to MDH. Further actions related to recertification for masks and/or antibiotics, or related to changes in your household status, will be communicated to you at a later date.

How will we know an attack had taken place?

This might be determined in a number of ways, including direct observation of the terrorist attack, air monitoring now in place that detects the possible release of bio-terror agents like anthrax, or because actual cases were diagnosed at local medical facilities.

Where will the antibiotics come from?

They will come from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, which is prepared for emergencies. The SNS has these medicines stored strategically throughout the country and can load them on planes or trucks and deliver them to any location in the contiguous United States within 24 hours of the federal decision to deploy them. Unless state or local Public Health elects to perform transportation to Postal Service Stations/Branches themselves, Postal volunteers will pick up medications at the State's Distribution Warehouse and take this inventory to designated Station/Branches for breakdown by route. Public health instruction sheets to accompany the medications will be pre-positioned as well.

Who's in charge of distributing the medicine, the federal government or the State Department of Health?

State and local health departments are responsible for distributing medications to their populace. Again, the Postal Service would only participate if and when state and local authorities find that their capability for antibiotic distribution cannot guarantee the provision of antibiotics to a large "at risk" population within a timely manner due to the scale of the attack and/or the speed required for effective treatment, such as in the case of anthrax.

Will we run out of medicines?



The medicines in the SNS will help protect millions of persons. If these supplies run low, the SNS will continue to purchase medicines from manufacturers, distributors, and any other available sources.

When will I be called to participate in such a response?

Public Health officials will declare a Public Health Emergency and instruct the public in selected ZIP Codes to stay in their homes and await delivery of antibiotics in their normal mail receptacles. Special instructions will also be provided for those who will not receive their medication through the Postal Plan regarding where local dispensing sites are located.

The Postmaster General will authorize the activation of the Postal Plan after consultation with the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS).

In the event of Postal Plan activation, you will be contacted by a Station/Branch Manager at either of the phone numbers you provided on the Volunteer Form. City letter carriers will wear their normal Postal uniform. Upon arrival at that Station/Branch, you will be tasked with at least one of the following duties:

- Pick up medicines at the State's Distribution Warehouse via an assigned Postal 2-Ton Cargo Truck or LLV, and deliver this inventory to a specific Station/Branch for breakdown by route.
- Remain at the Station/Branch to receive medicines from the Distribution Warehouse and allocate the appropriate amount for each route.
- Deliver the medicine and information sheet via standard Postal delivery vehicle, from the Station/Branch to each residential address on pre-identified routes, with a law enforcement escort.

How will my route be determined?

Under the present delivery plan, normal daily routes will be reconfigured to residential delivery only, and a pairing of 2 normal routes per carrier will be created to balance deliveries between carriers. Routes will be assigned during an activation based on the total number of volunteers reporting, so the 2:1 ratio may go up or down.

Who receives Postal Plan delivery of medication?

Those customers who occupy a normal residential address will receive the medication and instruction sheets in their normal mail receptacles. The actual ZIP Codes to be activated will be determined by local and State Public Health authorities.



What about non-residential addresses?

Post office boxes, general delivery (such as universities), will call, and business deliveries will not be covered through the Postal Plan. Those affected by such will be instructed to go to public health dispensing locations to receive their antibiotics.

What about normal mail delivery?

The Postal Service will cancel regular mail delivery for the affected ZIP Codes, and for any other ZIP Codes served by the affected Stations/Branches, for at least that day.

How will people know how to properly use the antibiotics?

In addition to instructions that will be provided with the medicines, Public Health will provide details and follow-up instructions through the mass media. Postal volunteers will refer the public to the information sheet and will not attempt to answer medical questions.

How long will this delivery mission take?

Our goal is to complete deliveries to households within 48 hours of putting such an emergency plan into motion, with a 12 hour window for actual street delivery. We expect to beat the 12 hour window based on the results of three operational drills already conducted in Seattle, Philadelphia, and Boston.

How long will I be activated?

Once your assigned task has been completed, you will return to your assigned Station/Branch and be released to return home. At that point, you can elect to use the disposable replacement clothing provided, and can continue to wear the mask if you so choose.

What should I say if someone from the media approaches me for comment?

At no time should you speak to the media regarding the Cities Readiness Initiative CRI and the Postal Plan. If you should be approached by someone in the media regarding CRI and the Postal Plan, we ask that you refer them to the appropriate communications personnel:

- HQ Public Affairs and Communication at (202) 268-2155
- Northland District Public Affairs and Communication at (612) 349-4428
- NALC National Communications at (202) 662-2489
- Your Local Union Branch



As a volunteer are there any activities I cannot perform under the Postal Plan?

- Postal volunteers **cannot / will not** be used in ad-hoc roles at dispensing sites (will not act as translators or in any other non-medical positions at antibiotic distribution clinics, etc.).
- Postal volunteers **cannot / will not** hand out information sheets and/or antibiotics directly at Post Offices.
- Postal volunteers **cannot / will not** deliver to addresses such as nursing homes, universities, or correctional facilities.
- Postal volunteers **cannot / will not** make dedicated deliveries to people with special needs (e.g. homebound). Deliveries to all residential addresses within a particular five digit ZIP Code (including special needs) will occur at the same time.
- Postal volunteers **cannot / will not** make separate deliveries of information sheets to residences. Delivery of information sheets will only occur in conjunction with the delivery of antibiotics.

What if I need additional information or decide I no longer want to participate?

If you have additional USPS related questions concerning the volunteer process or the duties of a volunteer please contact the USPS HQ CRI Postal Plan Information line at 1-866-476-6687.

If you have additional questions related to clearance and provisioning of medicine for you and/or your household members please contact the Minnesota Department of Health, Office of Emergency Preparedness at (651) 201-5700.

If you have additional questions related to the on-line FOH site, the FOH paper form, respiratory clearance, mask fit testing, personal protective equipment, etc., please contact CDR Terry Porter of FOH at (404) 562-7950, ext. 128.

If you want to opt out of this program once enlisted (no questions will be asked) you may notify Minnesota Department of Health, Office of Emergency Preparedness at (651) 201-5700, who will relay your decision to the Postal Service.