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Using Cell Phones to Teach Pandemic Flu Preparedness

CHICAGO, Feb. 20 (AScribe Newswire) -- A team from the University of Illinois at Chicago has developed the first interactive tool using mobile phones to educate the public about pandemic flu.

The free, interactive media -- called Mobile PanFlu Prep -- will be demonstrated at the Local, State and Federal Public Health Preparedness Summit Feb. 22-24 in Washington.

Public launch is March 1.

"It seems so logical, but this is the first time that cell phones have been used to communicate valuable public health information for disaster preparedness," said Colleen Monahan, director of the Center for the Advancement of Distance Education at the UIC School of Public Health, who was the creative force behind the concept. "This is a first-aid kit for the future."

Mobile PanFlu Prep can be downloaded to a cell phone as one would download an interactive game. A series of menu items and audio provide the user with information on flu symptoms, advice on avoiding the flu, and a checklist to prepare for pandemic flu.

The checklist gives specific information on how to prepare, including stockpiling supplies such as:

- water and non-perishable food
- first-aid kit, flashlight, batteries and portable radio
- face masks
- soap and alcohol-based hand wipes

Mobile PanFlu Prep is available in English and Spanish and contains rich graphics, animations, voice-overs, branching, scrolling text and record-keeping.

The initial rollout of Mobile PanFlu Prep will be available at no cost to select phones in the Sprint, Cingular and T-Mobile networks. Users can download the application at www.publichealthgames.com

"We hope that Mobile PanFlu Prep will help people think about the possible extent to which pandemic flu could affect their lives," said Kevin Harvey, manager of the City Readiness Training Group and a member of the creative team. "Preparedness is the key to mitigating potential consequences if pandemic flu were to happen."

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, pandemic flu is flu that causes a global outbreak of serious illness that spreads easily from person to person. Currently there is no pandemic flu, but public health experts and the federal government have encouraged individuals, organizations and communities to prepare for the threat.

The UIC team predicts that innovations in mobile phone technology will play an important role in education and training, as well as communicating timely information to the public about future disease outbreaks and disaster-driven emergencies.

The developers envision building a series of interactive media for mobile phones that might include training for chemical, biological and radiological emergencies. Such developments, however, require cooperation among the various mobile phone carriers.

"Our hope is that the mobile phone carriers will want to provide Mobile PanFlu Prep to their customers as a public service," Harvey said.

Kallisto Productions, Inc., a firm specializing in content-based productions for mobile phones, was part of the team that worked with UIC to implement the technology.

The Center for the Advancement of Distance Education at the UIC School of Public Health partners or contracts with university, government and organizations to provide web-based solutions to meet a variety of educational, training, research and administrative needs.

For more information about UIC, visit www.uic.edu

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Please refer to the institution as the University of Illinois at Chicago on first reference and UIC on second reference. "University of Illinois" and "U. of I." are often assumed to refer to our sister campus in Urbana-Champaign.

SUMMARY: A team from the University of Illinois at Chicago has developed the first interactive tool using mobile phones to educate the public about pandemic flu. The free, interactive media -- called Mobile PanFlu Prep -- launches March 1.

KEYWORDS: UIC, pandemic flu, public health preparedness



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