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Funds to aid flu preparedness

County health agency, Purdue will target state response for outbreaks

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Purdue University and the Marion County Health Department have received nearly \$800,000 in federal funds between them to embark on projects to help the state prepare for a pandemic flu outbreak.

Working with the Indiana State Department of Health, the Marion County Health Department will develop a plan for reaching vulnerable populations in Indianapolis in the event of an outbreak.

A \$275,000 grant will target non-English speakers, older adults and those who are disabled or homebound, as well as others who need additional assistance.

County health officials already have heard from people in these populations, asking what they should do in an emergency, said Dr. Virginia A. Caine, director of the Marion County Health Department.

"They think we've done a great job for the general public, but they have special needs, and they want to make sure that we're addressing their special needs," she said.

Purdue will turn its attention to rural hospitals and local health systems, ensuring that they have plans in place should there be an outbreak.

A \$523,000 grant will enable university researchers to assess each community, develop a plan on how to sustain essential services and run a drill to evaluate the plan, said Mary Anne Sloan, director of the Purdue Healthcare Technical Assistance Program.

"We may have a county that does not have a hospital. How does that look different than a county that has a hospital and what do they prioritize as essential services?" Sloan said.

Nine counties will collaborate on the assessments, which will be done with the state department of health.

The Indiana funds are two of 55 projects funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The government has allocated \$24 million to these projects in the hope that they will prove to be innovative approaches to pandemic flu preparedness.
