



**NATIONAL
NURSE-LED CARE
CONSORTIUM**
a PHMC affiliate

MODULE 4

TABLETOP EXERCISE SLACK CHAT

INTRODUCTION

According to CMS, a tabletop exercise (TTX) is “a group discussion led by a facilitator, using narrated, clinically-relevant emergency scenario, and a set of problem statements, directed messages, or prepared questions designed to challenge an emergency plan. It involves key personnel discussing simulated scenarios, including computer-simulated exercises, in an informal setting.” CMS requires that all health centers conduct at least two annual TTXs. all exercises should be documented and include an after action review process.

HOW DO YOU IMPLEMENT A TTX AT YOUR HEALTH CENTER?

TTXs are often most effective in-person and are typically 2-4 hours in length. Each department at the health centers should be represented in the TTX, though too many participants can be challenging to manage. Each TTX should aim to accomplish no more than **3-5 objectives that are “SMART”** - Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-Bound. For example, one of your TTX objectives might be to “Exercise paging system, voice, and in-person communications within the first 2 hours of the event.”

Health centers have many competing priorities and day-to-day tasks that can make planning a TTX challenging. The first step is to **engage leadership and establish buy-in** for the planning and implementation of tabletop exercises. To create buy-in, consider hosting a tabletop exercise just for leadership to demonstrate the process. You can also provide data demonstrating the potential revenue loss for health centers that are not adequately prepared for an emergency.

If your health center has multiple sites, consider **utilizing a virtual Simulation Cell**. A SimCell is a location from which controllers deliver telephone calls, radio messages, facsimiles, and other types of messages. These messages represent actions, activities, and conversations of an individual, agency, or organization that is not participating in the exercise but would likely be actively involved during a real incident.

In order to maintain focus and effectively manage your group, **utilize controllers or facilitators** to help keep conversations and timelines on track.

WHAT ARE TOPICS THAT SHOULD BE COVERED?

TTXs should be designed to test the plans that exist for those hazards that are on top of the hazard vulnerability analysis (HVA). Some topics of universal concern are:

- Severe weather
- Cybersecurity attack
- Infectious disease outbreak
- Communicatoinis/utility failure
- Electronic health record downtime

Scenarios should be plausible but also push the limits of your operations and resources.



WHAT SHOULD WE DO POST-EXERCISE?

CMS stipulates that documentation of exercises should be kept for 3 years (can be electronic or hard copies). CMS also requires that all exercises should be documented and include an after action review process. According to CMS, at a minimum the post-exercise report should include: (1) what was supposed to happen, (2) what actually happened, (3) what worked well, (4) what can be improved, and (5) include a timeline for improvements.

RESOURCES

FEMA has several online courses about exercises:

- [An Introduction to Exercises](#)
- [Exercising Continuity Plans for Pandemics](#)
- [Exercise Design and Development](#)
- [How to be an Exercise Evaluator](#)

Ready.gov has a [helpful informational page](#) about exercises that includes resources

DHS offers a [ready-made TTX](#) designed around cybersecurity.

[This YouTube video](#) outlines the TTX process.

The [Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program](#) (HSEEP) has resources and templates available. Please note that is is not a requirement to use HSEEP, but it is seen as a comprehensive tool for planning, conducting, and evaluating exercises.