



National Risk Assessment: the Risks of Disease causing a National Emergency

The Issue

- **What does the Committee consider are the most appropriate scenarios or parameters to use for planning for a significant national naturally occurring disease?**

The Background

1. UK is among the leading nations in having a systematic approach to identifying and assessing the risks of emergencies, and using the assessment – known as the National Risk Assessment or NRA – to devise mitigation strategies and programmes for all kinds of emergency.
2. Annex A outlines the method used to identify and assess the risks of emergency. Note that:
 - a. The NRA does not attempt to catalogue all risks, but to exemplify types of risk using a ‘reasonable worst case scenario’;
 - b. The criteria for identifying the risks of emergency are derived from the definition of an emergency in the Civil Contingencies Act¹. This means that the NRA only concerns itself with events, and not with persistent conditions or longer-term developments;
 - c. Risk is treated as a product of likelihood and impact;
 - d. The focus of the NRA is the next five years
3. At present, the risk of disease causing a state of emergency is represented by two scenarios: an influenza pandemic (known as H23) and a ‘newly emerging infectious disease’ (H24):
 - a. H23. This is the highest risk in the NRA with an assessed likelihood of happening over the next five years of between 1 in 2 and 1 in 20, and a catastrophic impact if it does. This risk is reviewed annually, and we expect to retain it as a separate risk in the NRA as it will continue to be of a different order of magnitude to other risks of disease.

¹ ‘an event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the UK’ – where serious damage is defined as ‘loss of human life, human illness or injury, homelessness, damage to property, disruption of supply of money, food, water, energy or fuel, disruption of ...communication ...transport or services related to health’

The National Risk Assessment and Risk Register

The National Risk Assessment process (NRA) is a comprehensive, classified assessment of the most significant emergencies (malicious and non-malicious) that people in the United Kingdom could face over the next five years. This assessment draws on expertise from a wide range of departments and agencies of Government. It is used for planning for emergencies at a Government level, and to provide guidance to local emergency planners and responders on the kinds of risks which they may need to assess and plan for in their local area. The objectives are: to assist in the prioritisation of risks for emergency planning purposes; to enable reasonable quantitative and qualitative estimates to be made of the likely consequences that need to be planned for; and to facilitate risk communication in both these areas (likelihood and impact) to be communicated to those planning for emergencies.

Since 2008, an unclassified version of the NRA called the National Risk Register of civil emergencies (NRR) has been produced to help individuals and communities interested in improving their own preparedness for emergencies. The NRR is publicly available and provides an indication of the types of risks the UK faces and an indication of what the Government is doing to prepare for them².

NRA Methodology

The NRA is updated annually. There are three stages to the assessment: the identification of risks; assessment of the likelihood of the risks occurring and their impact; and comparison of the risks. All three stages involve consultation of Subject Matter Experts and a standard process is used that is designed to ensure that the assessment of all individual risks is, to the extent possible, on a comparable basis:

- Risks are identified by consulting, through Government departments, a wide range of experts who are able to take an informed view of the seriousness of the risks according to the criteria in the Civil Contingencies Act. After initial scrutiny, most proposals are taken forward into a detailed assessment phase; some may be kept under review.
- The assessment is done on the basis of an agreed 'reasonable worst case scenario'. This concept is designed to exclude theoretically possible scenarios which have so little probability of occurring that planning for them would be likely

² See <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/national-risk-register>

to lead to disproportionate use of resources. They are not predictions of what will happen or the most likely manifestation of a particular type of hazard.

- Risks are assessed using objective historical, statistical and scientific data where they are available; where possible, the assessment looks forward to take account of known or probable developments over the next five years.
- Impacts are assessed against five main criteria: the numbers of fatalities that are likely to be directly attributable to the emergency; the extent of human illnesses or injury over a period following the onset of an emergency; social disruption, under ten headings designed to measure significant disruption – for example through disruption to essential services such as utilities and health services - to people's daily lives; economic damage; and the potential for significant outrage and anxiety to be caused to communities.

Most types of risk are reviewed every year, but some at longer intervals by experts within Government departments most affected.