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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COUNTY EXERCISES BIOTERRORISM PREPAREDNESS PLAN

JOLIET – The Will County Health Department joined forces with community partners to conduct a special bioterrorism preparedness exercise early Thursday.

The morning-long exercise was designed to test components of the Will County Pharmaceutical Distribution Plan. Personnel from the Will County Emergency Management Agency, the Highway Department, and the Sheriff's Office participated, along with representatives from Joliet's Provena Saint Joseph Medical Center and Silver Cross Hospital.

Other private sector agencies also played critical exercise roles. Representatives from the Elwood and Frankfort fire departments served as exercise evaluators.

The Health Department is the Will County agency responsible for responsive distribution of medications in a public health emergency. The Will County Pharmaceutical Distribution Plan is a comprehensive initiative designed to protect area residents and provide essential community awareness during a bioterrorism incident, critical disease outbreak, or other public health crisis.

Critical provisions of the plan include a flexible distribution component designed to counter the effects generated by a manmade or natural biological agent. The full support of Will County municipalities and government agencies is an integral part of the Pharmaceutical Distribution Plan, which is regarded as a state model by the Illinois Department of Public Health.

"The Health Department will play a most critical role in the event of a bioterrorism emergency requiring mass distributions of medication to Will County residents," according to Will County Health Department Executive Director James Zelko. "We hope that we never experience the emotional trauma and anguish associated with a bioterrorism emergency firsthand, but it's imperative that we be ready for any eventuality."

In accordance with Thursday's exercise, the Health Department activated its Emergency Command Center. The Command Center is staffed by a team of specially-trained public health personnel who help to coordinate emergency response protocols and procedures.

Exercising emergency preparedness plans promotes interagency coordination and cooperation at the municipal and county levels. Regular exercises also enhance regional emergency communications and preparedness.