Portsmouth holds vaccine distribution trial run

By Derek Gomes
Staff writer

PORTSMOUTH — Town staff and volunteers held an exercise Thursday inside Portsmouth High School to demonstrate how the town would distribute vaccines during a widespread medical emergency.

About 20 people executed various tasks throughout the drill, including putting up signs to direct residents, communicating over walkie-talkies and operating the area where residents would be administered the vaccine.

"We're going to try and put 10,000 people through this place in 24 hours," said Rich Talipsky, who serves as the medical emergency distribution system coordinator. "Hopefully you never have to do it, but you have to be ready."

The state Department of Health requires municipalities to complete exercises.

The exercise Thursday did not involve participants handing out doses, but simply completing the setup. Other exercises have volunteers attempt to enlist enough fellow volunteers within six hours to handle all the responsibilities, according to Talipsky.

The town's "point-of-dispensing" plan uses the high school and Portsmouth Middle School as a backup. The equipment at the high school is stored in a container on campus.

If the plan were put into effect during a chemical attack, for example, residents would head to the high school and be directed through the Turnpike Avenue entrance. Volunteers and staff would use the Education Lane entrance off Sprague Street, and Patriots Drive would be reserved as an exit.

Time is of the essence during crises, so volunteers seek to make traffic to and from the school and within the building as smooth as possible, according to Talipsky.

Once parked on campus, residents would enter the main foyer of the school and be led inside the auditorium down one aisle. Once there, they would fill out a medical

Dave Hansen | Staff photographer
Portsmouth Town Council member Linda Ujifusa sorts signs in the cafeteria at Portsmouth High School during a medical emergency set-up exercise on Thursday.