



**PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY of CANADA**  
**Pandemic Influenza Exercise Tool Kit**  
**Edition 3.1**

# **MODULE 1**

## **THE TABLETOP EXERCISE**



# The Tabletop Exercise

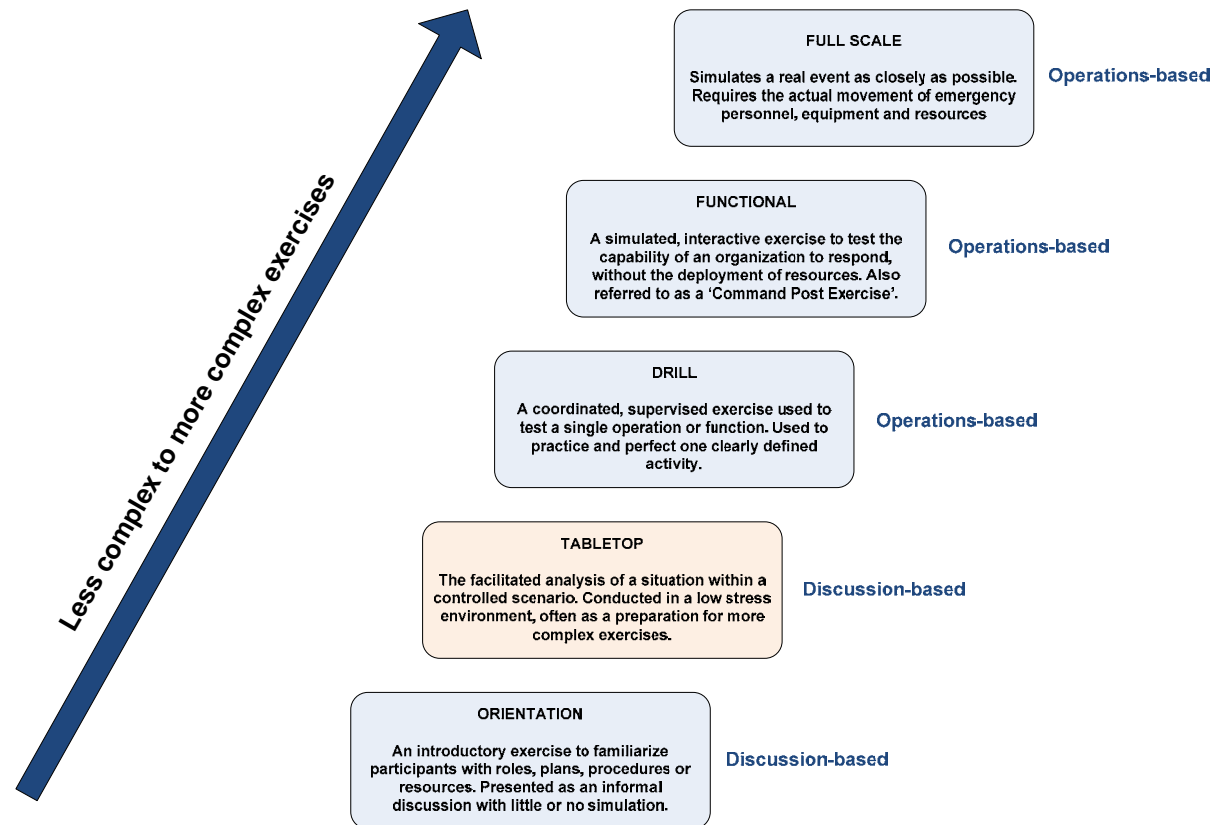
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## Introduction

- ❑ This presentation is designed to introduce the tabletop exercise as an emergency management tool.
- ❑ It covers the purpose, scope and types of tabletop exercises, and the basics of their design and development.
- ❑ The slides are available in *PowerPoint* format for presentations or in *Adobe Acrobat* format for individual use.

# The Tabletop Exercise

## The exercise hierarchy:





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## Why choose a tabletop exercise?

- ❑ The focus of a tabletop exercise is normally on familiarization with key roles, procedures and responsibilities.
- ❑ They are based on facilitated discussion and provide an opportunity for players to analyze emergency plans, policies and coordination issues.
- ❑ A well-structured tabletop exercise will enable managers to review or confirm mechanisms for dealing with critical issues.



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## Tabletop exercise characteristics:

- ❑ Discussion-based.
- ❑ Facilitated group analysis of a situation.
- ❑ Conducted in an informal, low-stress environment.
- ❑ Normally designed for the examination of plans or policies, combined with in-depth problem solving.
- ❑ Usually deal with “what if” scenarios.
- ❑ Delivered within a structured framework.



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How does a tabletop exercise differ from a workshop or seminar?

- ❑ An exercise is based on a specific scenario which evolves over time to facilitate the discussion.
- ❑ An exercise is more structured than a workshop or seminar, as the scenario limits the activity.
- ❑ A tabletop exercise is related to the *Cloth Model* and *Sand Table* exercises conducted by the military (audio-visual presentations have largely replaced the “tabletop” depictions of the exercise activity).



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## Exercise Purpose

- ❑ The exercise purpose should be captured in a broad statement which clearly identifies the aim.
- ❑ It should communicate the intent of the exercise.
- ❑ It does not contain detail on how the aim will be achieved.
- ❑ Example: “The purpose of this exercise is to validate our procedures for a flood emergency.”



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## Exercise Objectives

- ❑ An objective is a description of the performance expected from participants.
- ❑ Objectives provide a framework for the scenario.
- ❑ Possible objectives:
  - ❑ To introduce or validate a plan or policy.
  - ❑ To analyze or validate a decision-making process.
  - ❑ To prepare for a functional or field exercise.
  - ❑ To train or practice staff in emergency procedures.





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## Exercise Scope

- ❑ The scope identifies exactly what the exercise is to cover.
- ❑ It defines the composition and number of exercise participants.
- ❑ It limits the exercise by time, hazard type, plans to be exercised, etc.
- ❑ It must be kept manageable – neither too broad nor too complex.



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## Exercise Scenario

- ❑ The scenario is the “story line” on which an exercise is based. It must be:
  - ❑ realistic (believable);
  - ❑ threat-based; and
  - ❑ directly related to the exercise purpose.
- ❑ The scenario must be carefully designed to engage participants in a way that approximates real-world responses.
- ❑ It should be demanding but not overwhelming.



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## Exercise Participants

- There are three principal categories of exercise participants:
  - controllers (usually called “facilitators” in a tabletop exercise);
  - players; and
  - observers.
- It is important to maintain the distinction between “players” and “observers” (the terms are self-explanatory).



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## Exercise Documents

- ❑ Exercise documentation consists of the papers that are produced to provide guidance to planners, controllers/facilitators and participants.
- ❑ Documentation normally consists of:
  - ❑ Exercise General Instruction
  - ❑ Exercise Control Instruction
  - ❑ Player Handbook
  - ❑ After Action Review
- ❑ Much exercise coordination is now done online or via email.



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## Exercise General Instruction

- ❑ Key document in the preparation and conduct of a tabletop exercise.
- ❑ Confirms the intention to conduct an exercise and notifies participants.
- ❑ Provides the scenario, scope and purpose, objectives, dates/timings and essential logistic information.
- ❑ Normally issued 30-60 days in advance of the exercise.



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## Exercise Control Instruction

- ❑ Sets out how the exercise is to be staged and managed.
- ❑ Key document for exercise staff.
- ❑ Includes control structure and responsibilities, safety instructions, communications and other control matters.
- ❑ Has limited distribution.
- ❑ A separate *Control Instruction* may not be necessary for a simple tabletop exercise.



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## Player Handbook

- ❑ The player handbook is provided to all participants (including observers).
- ❑ It tells participants what to expect and sets out roles/responsibilities.
- ❑ The handbook will contain at least:
  - ❑ a participant list;
  - ❑ a summary of the exercise setup, purpose, conduct, etc;
  - ❑ control arrangements;
  - ❑ player responsibilities;
  - ❑ a detailed exercise timetable; and
  - ❑ on-site logistics.





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## After Action Review

- ❑ A “Hot Washup” should be held at the conclusion of the exercise to capture immediate feedback from participants.
- ❑ An *After Action Report* should be published as soon as possible after the exercise, to identify:
  - ❑ what went right;
  - ❑ what went wrong; and
  - ❑ where improvements are required to existing plans, policies or procedures.





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## Exercise Play

- ❑ A tabletop exercise is based on an evolving, linear scenario introduced in the opening narrative.
- ❑ *Situation Summaries* with associated discussion questions are introduced into the exercise on a timed schedule (this replaces the more formal *Master Scenario Events List* used in a functional exercise).
- ❑ Simulated media clips may be used for scene-setting.





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## Simulated Media Clips

- ❑ The media plays a high-profile role during emergency situations and is often the source of most public information.
- ❑ Simulated media clips are a useful way to add realism and clarity to an exercise, and may be used with good effect to “set the scene”.
- ❑ Some companies produce high technology, very realistic media clips specifically designed for exercises.





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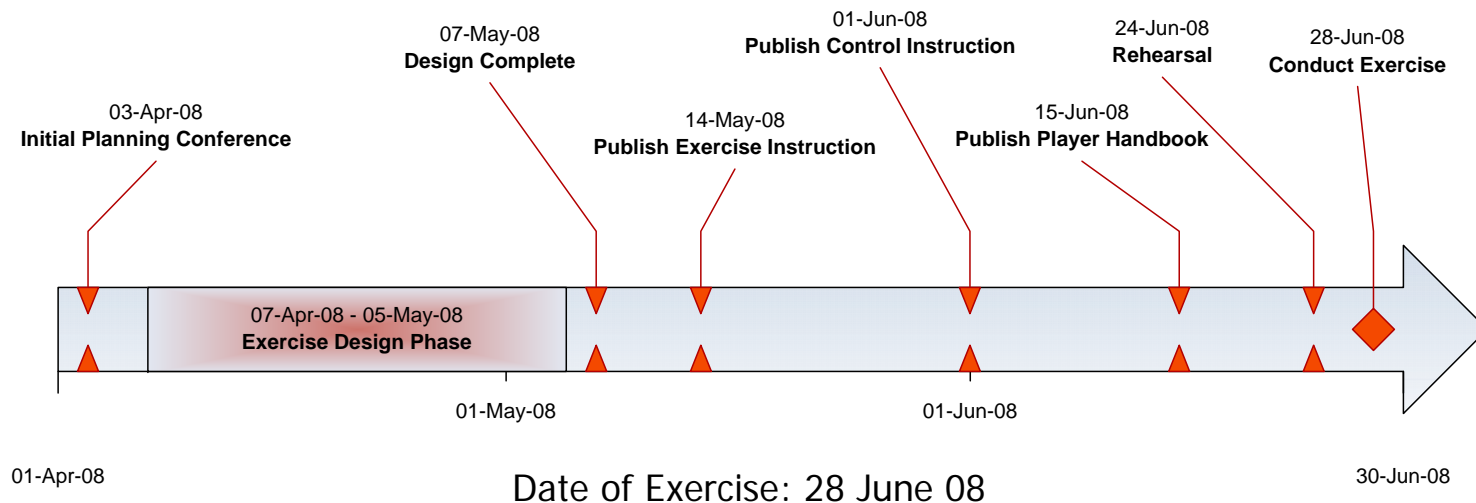
## The Planning Process:

- ❑ There are 10 key planning steps:
  - 1) Hold an initial planning conference.
  - 2) Secure the exercise venue and arrange resources.
  - 3) Prepare the Exercise General Instruction.
  - 4) Prepare the Exercise Control Instruction.
  - 5) Prepare the Player Handbook.
  - 6) Confirm and inspect the venue, conduct on-site inspection.
  - 7) Hold the final planning conference.
  - 8) Conduct a rehearsal.
  - 9) Conduct the exercise.
  - 10) Oversee the After Action Review.

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## Planning Time

A tabletop exercise needs sufficient planning time – this is a hypothetical example using a three-month planning period:





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## Some Keys to Success

- ❑ The best guarantor of success is GOOD PLANNING.
- ❑ No exercise will succeed without TEAMWORK. Exercise design and conduct is not an individual task.
- ❑ Success also depends on REHEARSAL. Don't drop this requirement no matter how tempting (e.g., "we're short of time" or "let's be flexible"). At the very least a complete walk-through with all exercise staff is required.
- ❑ The final key to success is the careful selection of participants. They must have a vested interest in the plan or concept being exercised. Responsible managers/officials must be included – "role players" never maximize exercise benefits.



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## Using the Exercise Tool Kit

- ❑ This slide presentation is part of a **Tool Kit** designed to assist with the preparation of scalable pandemic influenza tabletop exercises within the health community.
- ❑ The Tool Kit provides the material required to plan and conduct a simple tabletop exercise, including templates for key exercise documents, guidelines for most planning tasks and a generic exercise framework.
- ❑ The Tool Kit will greatly facilitate the preparation and conduct of a simple pandemic influenza tabletop exercise, but it doesn't replace the need for a good planning.



# The Tabletop Exercise

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This concludes Module 1

Good luck with your exercise planning.

