

It's Not Flu As Usual

WHAT INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES NEED
TO KNOW ABOUT PANDEMIC FLU



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Every winter, the U.S. suffers a seasonal flu that kills approximately 36,000 Americans and hospitalizes more than 200,000. Terrible as that is, health experts are now warning about a far more lethal kind of flu -- a pandemic flu that could kill over half a million Americans, hospitalize more than two million, cost our economy billions in lost productivity and direct medical expenses, and impact virtually every community.

Public health authorities are particularly concerned about the H5N1 avian "bird flu" virus that could mutate into a new strain of flu against which humans would have no immunity. The federal government has warned that such a bird flu pandemic could infect 30 percent of the U.S. population.

No one can accurately predict when the next influenza pandemic will occur or how severe it will be. What is known is that a flu pandemic occurs three to four times every century when a new influenza virus emerges. Pandemic flu spreads easily from person-to-person, may cause serious illness, and can sweep across the country and around the world in a very short time. A pandemic may come and go in waves, each of which might last for six to eight weeks.

If a severe pandemic were to hit the U.S., life as we know it could be seriously disrupted. Businesses and schools might have to shut down. Travel could be restricted. Essential government services -- including sanitation, water, power, and social services -- could be interrupted. The food supply could be affected. And public gatherings might have to be cancelled.

This potential scenario may sound frightening and seem overwhelming. But there are actions that you, your family, your employer, and others in your community can take to prepare for an outbreak and reduce the risks that a pandemic flu might pose. Worry and fear will not protect us -- knowing the facts and planning ahead will.

DON'T BE SCARED. BE PREPARED.

All of us want to do the right things to protect ourselves and our families in the event of a health emergency, including a pandemic flu outbreak. So it is important to take steps now to have a plan in place to protect your loved ones during a pandemic. Some of these are steps that should be taken to prepare for other types of public health emergencies, so doing them now in preparation for a pandemic flu could benefit you in other situations as well.

This brochure will help you and your family:

- Learn the facts about pandemic influenza.
- Anticipate challenges your family may face if a severe pandemic disrupts your normal work, school, and social routines.
- Take common sense precautions to prevent the spread of germs and practice good health habits.

Key Differences Between Annual Flu And Pandemic Flu

ANNUAL FLU	PANDEMIC FLU
Occurs every year during the winter months.	Occurs three to four times a century and can take place in any season. May come in "waves" of flu activity that could be separated by months.
Affects 5-20 percent of the U.S. population.	Experts predict an infection rate of 25-50 percent of the population, depending on the severity of the virus strain.
Globally, kills 500,000-1 million people each year, 36,000-40,000 in the U.S.	The worst pandemic of the last century -- the "Spanish Flu" of 1918 -- killed 500,000 in the U.S. and 50 million worldwide.
Most people recover within a week or two.	Usually associated with a higher severity of illness and, consequently, a higher risk of death.
Deaths generally confined to "at risk" groups, such as the elderly (over 65 years of age); the young (children aged 6-23 months); those with existing medical conditions like lung diseases, diabetes, cancer, kidney, or heart problems; and people with compromised immune systems.	All age groups may be at risk for infection, not just "at risk" groups. Otherwise fit adults could be at relatively greater risk, based on patterns of previous epidemics. For example, adults under age 35 (a key segment of the U.S. workforce) were disproportionately affected during the 1918 pandemic.
Vaccination is effective because the virus strain in circulation each winter can be fairly reliably predicted.	A vaccine against pandemic flu may not be available at the start of a pandemic. New strains of viruses must be accurately identified, and producing an effective vaccine could take six months.
Antiviral drugs are generally available for those most at risk of serious illnesses.	Antiviral drugs may be in limited supply, and their effectiveness will only be known definitively once the pandemic is underway.



The role of government

If pandemic flu strikes, the government will be responsible for issuing information and warnings to the public, and for working with the media to disseminate advice on how to avoid becoming ill. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov) and the federal government's consolidated pandemic influenza Web site (www.pandemicflu.gov) are good sources of information about pandemic flu.

Your state and local public health departments also are excellent resources. Local government officials will communicate with the public about infection control policies in your community and provide other important information.



STEPS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY CAN TAKE NOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ Teach your children about the following common-sense precautions to prevent the spread of flu and model these behaviors yourself.
 - Avoid close contact with people who are sick. If you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too.
 - Stay home when you're sick or have flu symptoms. Get plenty of rest and check with your doctor.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve, not your hands. This may prevent those around you from getting sick.
 - Clean your hands. Washing your hands often will help protect you and others against germs. When soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based disposable hand rubs or gel sanitizers.
- ✓ Practice other good health habits.
 - Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious foods.
 - Avoid smoking, which may increase the risk of serious consequences if you do contract the flu.
- ✓ Discuss important health issues with your family and loved ones.
 - Ask them about how/where they would be cared for if they become ill and discuss what would be needed to care for them at home.
 - Think about who will care for children/people with special needs if all adults in the household are ill.
 - Are there other family members or neighbors who can fill in? Make those plans now and communicate them to all who need to know.

- ✓ Have generic medical and health supplies on hand. Examples include supplies like soap or alcohol-based hand wash; medicines for fever, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen; thermometer; fluids with electrolytes; and tissues.
- ✓ Anticipate shortages of common prescription drugs and plan accordingly. If you or a family member has a chronic disease and regularly takes prescription drugs, talk to your physician/pharmacist/insurance plan about having several weeks of medications stockpiled at home.
- ✓ Anticipate shortages in perishable foods, water, and common household emergency supplies. The federal government recommends stockpiling non-perishable food items, water, portable radios, batteries, flashlights, garbage bags, and manual can openers.
- ✓ Anticipate social disruption and make backup plans.
 - Schools may be closed for an extended period of time, so consider pooling child care resources with neighbors and learn if there will be community-designated child care facilities for children who are not ill.
 - Since being able to go to work may be difficult or impossible, talk to your employer about the possibility of telecommuting or working from home.
 - Transportation services may be disrupted, so consider carpooling options to go to work, schools, and supermarkets to reduce your reliance on public transportation.
 - Other public and community services may be disrupted. These could include services provided by hospitals and other health care facilities, banks, stores, restaurants, government offices, and post offices. Think about how you and your family might compensate if you are cut off from these services.
- ✓ Understand your company's sick leave and family and medical leave policies.
- ✓ To fight the annual flu, get a flu shot. Even those who are not in the high-risk categories should get a flu shot if enough vaccine is available. Those who have underlying medical conditions and everyone 65 or older should get a one-time pneumococcal vaccine.
- ✓ Do NOT go to work, school, or to any public place if you become ill!

A more comprehensive pandemic planning checklist for individuals and families has been developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and can be found at www.pandemicflu.gov.



✓ Create a family health emergency plan. Complete this chart and post it on your refrigerator, family bulletin board or other prominent place. Make a copy and keep it in a safe place and be sure to tell all who may need to know where it is.

CONTACTS:	NAME/PHONE NUMBER:
Local personal emergency contact	
Out-of-town emergency contact	
Hospitals near: Work School Home	
Family physician(s)	
Pharmacy	
Employer contact and emergency information	
School contact and emergency information	
Religious/spiritual organization	
Veterinarian	
Local Public Health Department	

- ✓ It is important to think about other health issues that could arise if a pandemic flu occurs. For example, if a mass vaccination clinic is set up in your community, you may need to provide as much information as you can about your medical history when you go, especially if you have a serious health condition or allergy.
 - Document the blood type, allergies, current medications and dosages, and current and previous medical conditions of each family member. Like much of the planning for a pandemic, this can also help prepare for other emergencies. This chart should help.

Family Member	Blood Type	Allergies	Past/Current Medical Conditions	Current Medications/ Dosages