

Pandemic Influenza - Get Informed & Be Prepared

A Guide for Individuals and Families

This guide is designed to help you understand the threat of a pandemic influenza outbreak in our country and your community. It describes common sense actions you can take now in preparing for a pandemic. We cannot predict how severe the next pandemic will be or when it will occur. But being prepared may help lower the impact of influenza pandemic on you and your family. Additional information including a planning checklist for individuals and families can be found at www.pandemicflu.gov.

What You Need to Know

An influenza (flu) pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of flu disease. A pandemic will last much longer than most flu outbreaks. It may include "waves" of influenza activity that last 6-8 weeks separated by months.

Some Differences Between Seasonal Flu and Pandemic Flu

Seasonal Flu	Pandemic Flu
Caused by influenza viruses that are similar to those already circulating among people.	Caused by a new influenza virus that people have not been exposed to before. People will not have immunity to the new virus.
Symptoms include fever, headache, tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny nose, and muscle pain. Deaths can be caused by complications such as pneumonia.	Symptoms similar to the common flu but may be more severe and cause more serious complications including death.
Healthy adults usually not at risk for serious complications while the very young, the elderly, and those with certain underlying health conditions are at increased risk for serious complications.	Healthy adults may be at increased risk for serious complications.

Importance and Benefits of Being Prepared

The effects of a pandemic can be lessened if you prepare ahead of time. Preparing for a disaster will bring peace of mind and confidence when dealing with a pandemic.

When a pandemic starts, everyone around the world can be at risk. The United States has been working with other countries and the World Health Organization (WHO) to better/faster detect outbreaks of influenza that might cause a pandemic.

A pandemic would touch every aspect of your daily life.

Pandemic Influenza - Challenges and Preparation

As you and your family plan for an influenza pandemic, think about the challenges you might face.

➤ ***Essential Services You Depend Upon May Be Disrupted***

Plan for the possibility that usual services may be disrupted. These could include services provided by hospitals and other healthcare facilities, banks, restaurants, government offices, telephone and cellular phone companies, and post offices.

- Stores and restaurants may close or have limited supplies.
- Transportation services may be disrupted and you may not be able to rely on public transportation. Also your ability to travel by car may also be interrupted due to fuel shortages.
- Public gatherings, such as volunteer meetings and worship services, may be canceled.
- Prepare contact lists including conference calls, telephone chains, and email distribution lists, to access or distribute necessary information.
- Talk to your family about where family members and loved ones will go in an emergency and how they will receive care, in case you cannot communicate with them.
- Widespread illness could result in the shut down of local ATMs and banks. Keep a small amount of cash or traveler's checks in small denominations for easy use.

➤ ***Food and Water Supplies May Be Interrupted and Limited***

Food and water supplies may be interrupted so temporary shortages could occur. You may also be unable to get to a store. To prepare for this possibility you should store at least one to two weeks supply of non-perishable food and fresh water for emergencies. Please refer to "Pandemic Flu: Planning Checklist."

➤ ***Going to Work May Be Difficult or Impossible***

- Ask your employer how business will continue during a pandemic.
- Discuss staggered shifts or working at home with your employer. Discuss telecommuting possibilities and needs, accessing remote networks, and using portable computers.
- Discuss possible flexibility in leave policies. Discuss with your employer how much leave you can take to care for yourself or a family member.
- Plan for possible loss of income if you are unable to work or the company you work for temporarily closes.

➤ *Schools and Daycare Centers May Be Closed*

Schools (public and private), childcare centers, trade schools, and colleges/universities may be closed for an extended period of time to limit the spread of flu in the community. School closings would likely happen very early in a pandemic and could occur on short notice.

- Talk to your teachers, administrators, and parent-teacher organizations about your school's pandemic plan, and offer your help.
- Plan now for children staying at home for extended periods of time, as school closings may occur along with restrictions on public gatherings, such as at malls, movie theaters.
- Plan home learning activities and exercises that your children can do at home. Have learning materials, such as books, school supplies, and educational computer activities and movies on hand.
- Talk to teachers, administrators, and parent-teacher organizations about possible activities, lesson plans, and exercises that children can do at home if schools are closed. This could include continuing courses by TV or the Internet.
- Plan entertainment and recreational activities that your children can do at home. Have materials, such as reading books, coloring books, and games, on hand for your children to use.

➤ *Medical Care for People with Chronic Illness Could be Disrupted*

In a pandemic, hospitals and doctors' offices may be overwhelmed.

- If you have a chronic disease, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma, or depression, you should continue taking medication as prescribed by your doctor.
- Make sure you have necessary medical supplies such as glucose and blood pressure monitoring equipment.
- Talk to your healthcare provider to ensure adequate access to your medications.
- If you receive ongoing medical care such as dialysis, chemotherapy, or other therapies, talk with your healthcare provider about plans to continue care during a pandemic.

Pandemic Influenza - Prevention and Treatment

➤ *Stay Healthy*

These steps may help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses such as the flu:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze-throw the tissue away immediately after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. If you are not near water, use an alcohol-based (60-95%) hand cleaner.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- If you get the flu, stay home from work, school, and social gatherings. In this way you will help prevent others from catching your illness.

- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs often spread this way.

➤ ***Shots (Vaccination)***

Vaccines are used to protect people from catching a virus. If someone has been infected by a virus, a vaccine generally cannot help.

Currently, there is *no* human pandemic influenza vaccine. Once a vaccine has been made, the supply of pandemic vaccine will be limited, especially in the early stages of a pandemic.

➤ ***Medicine (Antivirals)***

A number of antivirals are approved to treat and prevent seasonal influenza. Some of these antivirals may be helpful in treating pandemic influenza. However, medications alone cannot effectively contain the spread of pandemic influenza. The Federal government is stockpiling antivirals that would be used in the early stages of an influenza pandemic. These drugs are available by prescription only.

Stay Informed

Knowing the facts is the best preparation. Identify sources you can count on for reliable information. If a pandemic occurs, having accurate and reliable information will be critical.

- Visit: www.pandemicflu.gov
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) hotline:

1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) (available in English and Spanish 24/7)

TTY: 1-888-232-6348

Questions can be emailed to inquiry@cdc.gov.

- Links to state departments of public health can be found at www.pandemicflu.gov/state/statecontacts.html

Information produced by FMCSA: Office of Medical Programs