

Influenza and Flu Pandemic Information

An influenza, or flu, pandemic happens when a new flu virus appears that easily spreads from person to person and around the world. Experts cannot predict when the next flu pandemic may occur, or how severe it will be, but there are several websites with valuable information regarding what you can do to prepare yourself in the event of a public health emergency.

American Red Cross on Influenza

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Influenza, also known as the flu, is a contagious respiratory disease caused by viruses. In the United States, the seasonal flu begins every fall and ends every spring. Sometimes, a new type of flu virus may emerge to which the general public has no resistance. The lack of immunity enables the virus to spread quickly and easily from person to person impacting communities around the world in a very short time, causing serious illness and death. This kind of flu is called pandemic flu.

The exact symptoms of pandemic flu are unknown. However, the CDC notes that symptoms are expected to be similar to those of seasonal flu, which include:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Extreme fatigue
- Headache
- Muscle aches and pains
- Stomach problems; nausea, vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children).

Research suggests that it may take two to seven days to show symptoms when a person catches the flu, and the symptoms may last for up to a week. A person infected with the flu may transmit the flu for one to two days before they have symptoms, and for five to seven days after symptoms begin.

Why the concern over pandemic flu?

Pandemic flu is more serious than seasonal flu. Most people who get seasonal flu recover within a week or two and usually do not require medical treatment. Pandemic flu is different because more people who get it might not recover, even with medical treatment, and people of every age may be at risk of serious illness or death.

Who is more at risk?

The very young, the very old and the very sick are most likely to become seriously ill from any form of the flu virus.



What about a vaccine?

Unlike seasonal flu, there is no **vaccine** for pandemic flu until researchers and pharmaceutical companies are able to create one, which takes time. Even if a vaccine is developed for the pandemic flu, it will be a challenge to manufacture and dispense the vaccine to everyone in a timely manner.

When will this happen? Can I do something now?

Scientists cannot accurately predict whether the avian influenza virus (H5N1) will cause the next human pandemic flu or when the next pandemic will occur.

The best way to protect yourself and others is to practice healthy hygiene to keep you well now and during a flu pandemic. Practicing these actions now will make them easier to do later. These actions include washing your hands, covering your cough and staying home when you are sick to slow the spread of illness.

Pandemic Flu

Scientists have informed organizations in the U.S. and abroad about the significant possibility of an influenza (flu) pandemic occurring. Even though they cannot accurately predict when the next pandemic will occur, or what type of flu will cause the next human pandemic, scientists all agree that the best action the public can take now to prepare.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is constantly on the look out for the first signs of a flu pandemic. At first sign, the WHO will take immediate steps to try to contain it. Once a flu pandemic affects other countries, it will reach the United States. With the popularity of air travel, the chances of it reaching the U.S. sooner are increased.

The WHO will inform governments worldwide when a flu pandemic starts. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will make announcements in the U.S. advising the best course of action – using television, radio, print and the internet throughout different phases of a pandemic.

The Red Cross works with organizations such as the WHO and CDC, and at this time has taken on the role of working with communities across the country on flu pandemic education. As an organization that connects individuals and families to important preparedness information every day, the Red Cross continues to develop flu pandemic materials that can be easily understood and applied in your community and household.

Planning for Pandemic Flu

During a flu pandemic, government officials may be required to limit community movement or impose travel restrictions to help prevent the flu virus from spreading. Things to keep in mind: You may be asked to stay home for an extended period of time even if you are not sick. Schools, workplaces and public gatherings such as sporting events or worship services may close temporarily.



Mass transportation may be limited.

You, your family and friends may need to rely on each other when you cannot depend on the services you normally use.

Think about how you handle stress and know your strengths. Take steps to plan for, get through and recover from a flu pandemic.

Planning at Home

Store a two-week supply of food. Select foods that do not require refrigeration, preparation or cooking. Ensure that formula for infants and any child's or older person's special nutritional needs are a part of your planning.

Store a two-week supply of water, 1 gallon of water per person per day, in clean plastic containers. Avoid using containers that will decompose or break, such as milk cartons or glass bottles.

Store a supply of nonprescription drugs, such as pain relievers, cough and cold medicines, stomach remedies and anti-diarrheal medication, as well as vitamins and fluids with electrolytes (such as sports drinks).

Store health and cleaning supplies, such as bleach, tissues, a thermometer, disposable gloves, soap and alcohol-based hand sanitizers.

Ask your health care provider and health insurance company if you can get an extra supply of your regular prescription drugs and medical supplies, such as glucose monitoring supplies.

Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got sick.

Planning in Your Community

Ask about plans to enable you to stay home if you are or a family member is sick.

Find out your employer's plans to keep the business open if key staff can't come to work.

Find out now about your child's school or daycare provider's plans for handling a flu pandemic.

Ask if there are plans to encourage sick children to stay home to reduce the spread of the disease.

Ask if there are plans to close during a pandemic that would require all the children to remain at home.

Finding out the answers ahead of time will have a significant impact on your plans and decisions during a flu pandemic.

Glossary of Terms

Antiviral	A medication that may be used to treat people who have been infected by a virus to help limit the impact of some symptoms and reduce the potential for serious complications. People who are in high risk groups are often given antiviral drugs because of their increased potential to develop additional health issues.
Epidemic	The rapid spread of a disease that infects some or many people in a community or region at the same time.
H5N1 (bird flu) H1N1 (swine flue)	The scientific names for subtypes of influenza viruses that has spread from animals to humans. The scientific names for these subtypes are classified by different proteins on the virus. New subtypes naturally occur when the proteins change.
Influenza (flu)	A contagious respiratory illness caused by particular strains of viruses.
Influenza Pandemic	A global outbreak of the influenza disease that occurs when a new influenza virus appears in the human population. Because people have little or no immunity to the new strain, serious illness can occur, and the virus can spread easily and rapidly from person to person with no vaccine immediately available.
Isolation	The physical separation of a person suffering from an infectious or contagious disease from others in a community.
Pandemic	An outbreak of a disease that affects large numbers of throughout the world.
Pandemic Influenza	A virulent influenza (flu) caused by a new flu virus strain to which humans have not been exposed. It is more serious than a typical seasonal flu because there is no natural resistance or immunity to it and infects large numbers of people of different ages all over the world, causing serious illness and possibly death.
Quarantine	The physical separation of healthy people who have been exposed to an infectious disease, for a period of time, from those who have not been exposed.
Seasonal Flu	A contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza (flu) viruses occurring every year. It affects an average of 5 to 20 percent of the U.S. population by causing mild to severe illness, and in some instances can lead to death. Most people have some immunity, and a vaccine is available.
Social Distancing	A disease prevention strategy in which a community imposes limits on social (face-to-face) interaction to reduce exposure to and transmission of a disease. These limitations could include, but are not limited to, school and work closures, cancellation of public gatherings and closure or limited mass transportation.
Vaccine	An injection, usually of an innocuous (weak or killed) form of the virus that stimulates the production of antibodies by the immune system to help prevent or create resistance to an infection. Vaccines are usually given as a preventive measure



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For More Information

The American Red Cross

303.772.7474

www.redcross.org

Federal Emergency Management Agency

202.646.4500

www.fema.gov/areyouready

Colorado Division of Emergency Management

720.852.6600

<http://www.dola.state.co.us/dem/index.html>

Office of Emergency Management – Boulder County Sheriff's Department

303.441.3884

<http://www.bouldercounty.org/sheriff/oem/plan.htm>

University of Colorado Emergency Response Plan

<http://www.colorado.edu/safety/response.html>

Boulder Valley School District

303.448.1010

www.bvsd.org

Louisville Police Department

303.666.8633

Louisville Fire Protection District

303.666.6595

www.louisvillefire.com

World Health Organization (WHO)

www.who.int