



Pandemic Influenza Coordinating Committee

Of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties

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Emergencies and disasters come in many forms. The potential for severe weather (tornadoes, floods and ice storms), E.coli outbreaks, and hazardous materials spills are just a few of the potential disasters we all should be prepared for, but most of us are not. But did you know that there is another major disaster of global proportions we should be preparing for as well?

An influenza pandemic is an outbreak of a new and highly contagious flu virus that spreads quickly around the world. The virus will spread easily from person to person, mostly through coughing and sneezing. Because the virus is new, everyone will be at risk.

The last major pandemic occurred 89 years ago (1918-1919), killing 675,000 Americans. Scientists believe the H5N1 virus, better known as avian (bird) flu, may be changing and could evolve into the next pandemic flu virus. Experts agree that it is not a matter of *IF* another pandemic will occur, but *WHEN*.

If a pandemic similar to the pandemic of 1918 were to happen today, health experts estimate that 90,000,000 Americans could die. People will not be able to go to work because they are sick or caring for someone who is sick. Services in our community, such as utilities, grocery stores, and public transportation, may be disrupted. Schools may close. Eventually there will be a vaccine; however it will take time to produce a larger supply.

Preparing now will make it easier for you and your family during a pandemic. We encourage you to take some simple steps, such as stocking up on food, medicines, and other essential supplies; practicing good health habits; and making advance plans to minimize confusion and disruption during a pandemic or any type of emergency.

We hope you will find this website informative and helpful as you begin or expand your preparedness efforts. **If you have questions about emergency preparedness or pandemic influenza, please contact the Mid-Michigan District Health Department at 989-831-3662 and ask to speak with its Emergency Preparedness Specialist.**

*Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD)
serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties*

Frequently asked questions

The threat of a flu pandemic is real. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other leading public health experts agree that it is not a question of IF a pandemic will occur, but WHEN it will occur. Preparing now will make a difference to you and your family during a pandemic.

What is a flu pandemic?

A flu (influenza) pandemic is an outbreak of a new flu virus that spreads around the world. The virus will spread easily from person to person, mostly through coughing and sneezing. Because the virus is new to people, everyone will be at risk of getting it.

How does pandemic flu differ from seasonal flu?

There are important differences between pandemic flu and seasonal flu.

- People will have little or no immunity to pandemic flu since it is a new virus to humans. With seasonal flu, people have some immunity built up from previous exposure to the viruses.
- Symptoms of pandemic flu may be more severe than seasonal flu.
- Pandemic flu could happen at any time of the year. Seasonal flu usually occurs in the fall and winter in the United States.
- Vaccines for pandemic flu may not be available for 4-6 months after a pandemic starts. Vaccines for seasonal flu are available each year and are based on known flu strains.

What are the effects of a flu pandemic?

A flu pandemic will have a significantly impact on society. A pandemic could result in a large number of people falling ill, including children and young adults, with many deaths. A pandemic could also require restrictions on travel, alterations to normal business operations, and dismissal of students from school to help slow the spread of infection.

Why should we be concerned now?

CDC and other leading public health experts agree that the threat of a flu pandemic is real- it's not a question of IF one will happen, but WHEN it will happen. They are concerned now that the H5N1 virus (bird flu) is changing and could evolve into a pandemic flu virus.

Why should we prepare now?

It is impossible to predict when the next flu pandemic will occur or how severe it will be. Regardless of where a pandemic starts, everyone around the world will be at risk. If you do not take steps to prepare before a pandemic, it will be harder for you to follow important health advice when a pandemic occurs.

What are the symptoms of a pandemic flu infection?

The symptoms of a pandemic flu infection will likely be similar to those of seasonal flu, but they may last longer and be more severe.

Will there be a vaccine available for pandemic flu?

Flu vaccines are designed to protect against a specific virus, so a pandemic vaccine cannot be produced until a new pandemic flu virus emerges and has been identified. Therefore, a vaccine for pandemic flu may not be available for 4-6 months after a pandemic starts, and even then, it may only be available in limited amounts.

Will we need to wear face masks and respirators during a flu pandemic?

If used correctly, face masks and respirators may help prevent some exposure to flu viruses. However, face masks should be used along with other preventative measures, such as frequent hand washing.

How is the United States preparing for the next flu pandemic?

- The U.S. is working with other nations and the World Health Organization (WHO) to strengthen systems to detect and contain outbreaks of viruses that may cause a pandemic.
- The U.S. is improving vaccine technology in order to produce vaccines quickly and in large quantities.
- Preparedness information and checklists have been developed for different sectors of the economy and for individuals, families and communities, to help reduce the effects of a pandemic.
- The Government is providing funding, advice and other support to States to assist with preparations.
- The Government is providing up-to-date information through www.pandemicflu.gov, the official Government website on this topic.
- The United States is stockpiling antiviral medicines, such as Tamiflu, to treat persons sick with pandemic flu.

How should individuals prepare?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), CDC and health experts ask individuals to stock up on foods and other necessities, improve health, and plan ahead for how they will care for themselves and family members during a flu pandemic.

Stock up:

- Store nonperishable foods, bottled water, over-the-counter drugs, health supplies, and other necessities.
- HHS recommends having a two-week supply, but stocking up can take place over time.
- These supplies can be useful in other types of emergencies, such as power outages.

Improve Health:

- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently throughout the day.
- Cover your nose and mouth with your sleeve or a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Stay away from people who are sick.

Plan ahead:

- Plan for what you will do in the following cases:
 - if schools are closed
 - if you cannot go to work, or
 - if you or a family member becomes sick and needs care.

What groups of people are most likely to be affected during a flu pandemic?

Susceptibility to the pandemic flu virus will be universal. Few people, if any, would have immunity to the virus. High risk groups for severe and fatal infections are likely to include infants, the elderly, pregnant women, persons with chronic medical conditions as well as young, healthy individuals with active immune systems.

What other strategies will help protect Americans in the event of an influenza pandemic?

In the event of a pandemic, certain public health measures may be implemented to help contain or limit the spread of infection as effectively as possible. Strategies may include:

- Treating sick and exposed people with antivirals
- Isolating sick people in hospitals, homes or other facilities
- Identify and quarantine exposed people
- Closing schools and workplaces as needed
- Canceling public events
- Restricting travel

If there was a flu pandemic, what can I do to stay healthy?

You can reduce, but not eliminate, the risk of catching or spreading flu during a pandemic by:

- Covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing (use a tissue when possible)
- Disposing of dirty tissues promptly and carefully
- Avoiding non-essential travel and large crowds when possible
- Maintaining good basic hygiene
- Cleaning hard surfaces frequently
- Being a good example to others

What should I do if I catch the flu?

- Stay at home and rest
- Take medications prescribed by your physician such as aspirin and ibuprofen to relieve symptoms. Please note: children under 16 must not be given aspirin or ready made flu remedies containing aspirin.
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Contact your doctor if your condition worsens

Brought to you by:



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