

Parent Resources

Influenza Pandemic: What You Should Know

What is a pandemic?

A pandemic is an outbreak on multiple continents at the same time. It is usually caused by a new virus that people are not immune to and for which there is no vaccine. A massive influenza outbreak would impact everyone in one way or another. Many people would become ill from the virus, and some could even die.

A pandemic would likely be a prolonged and widespread outbreak that could require temporary changes in many areas of society (school, work, transportation and other public services). Worry about a pandemic has arisen from the spread of avian (bird) flu, a virus that health officials fear could mutate into a form passed among humans.

Flu symptoms

- Fever
- Body aches
- Tiredness
- Sore throat
- Headaches
- Chills
- Dry cough
- Nasal congestion

Practice good health habits including eating a balanced diet, exercising daily and getting sufficient rest. Use these common-sense steps to limit the spread of germs:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water; use a hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth since the virus on your hands could enter your body via these routes.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues. If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into your upper shirt sleeve.

The virus is sprayed into the air if coughs and sneezes are not covered.

- Get annual flu vaccinations.
- Stay away from others as much as possible if you are sick.

Surviving a pandemic means knowing what to do, staying in touch with each other and having essential supplies on hand in case you need to spend an extended period of time at home.

Build your own flu care kit

Keep supplies on hand to care for yourself or family members who get the flu. It will be important to have extra supplies in case you are unable to get to the store.

- Pain and fever reducers such as Tylenol and ibuprofen (no aspirin for kids under age 12)
- Cough medicine
- Thermometer
- Chicken soup
- Throat lozenges (adults/older children)
- Nonperishable foods
- Decongestant
- Tea and juice
- Tissues

How to care for yourself and your family during an influenza pandemic

- Stay home if you are sick, and keep away from other people. The flu is easily spread through coughs and sneezes. If you have the flu, avoid public places and close contact with others.
- Call your health care provider for instructions. Avoid exposing others in the waiting room to the virus unless it is an emergency. Available antivirals might lessen the effects if started within 48 hours of symptoms.

- Wash and dry your hands after you cough, sneeze, wipe or blow your nose (or your child's nose), or use the restroom. Wash and dry your hands before preparing food, eating or caring for anyone who is ill.
- Cover coughs and sneezes. Tissues are best, but cough or sneeze into your upper shirt sleeve if tissues are not available.
- Give Tylenol for fever. Do not give aspirin to children younger than 12.
- Make sure the ill have plenty of fluids to drink to prevent dehydration.

No one can predict when a flu pandemic might occur. If you are informed and prepared, you can take appropriate action to decrease your family's risks during a pandemic. With help from influenza specialists in the U.S. and other countries, the World Health Organization is closely monitoring flu infections around the world and will announce when a potential pandemic strain emerges.

Stay informed about pandemic influenza and be prepared to respond

- Consult <http://www.pandemicflu.gov> frequently for updates on national and international information on pandemic influenza.
- Contact national and local pandemic hotlines that would be established in the eventuality of a global influenza outbreak.
- Listen to the radio, watch television and read the newspaper to keep up-to-date on any influenza outbreak.



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