

# What You Should Know

Pandemic influenza (flu) is a worldwide outbreak of a new flu virus for which there is little or no immunity (protection) in the human population. Scientists and health professionals are concerned that the current virus in birds (avian flu) may develop into the next human pandemic. Pandemic flu can spread easily from person-to-person, cause serious illness and death. When new pandemic flu spreads it creates a public health emergency. This emergency will not be like anything we've faced before. A pandemic will last longer, make more people seriously ill and may cause more deaths than any other health crisis in our time.

A long-lasting and widespread outbreak of the disease could mean changes in many areas of our lives. Schools might need to temporarily close. Public transportation could be limited and air flights may be cancelled. Because so many people will be ill, many employees will not be able to go to work and many businesses and public services may have to close or limit hours.

It is very important to plan ahead. Federal, state and local governments are taking steps to better prepare for and respond to a pandemic. Individuals also need to take action to be better prepared.

## ABOUT AVIAN FLU

Avian influenza (flu) is also known as bird flu. A non-human flu virus causes this infection in birds. Bird flu is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds – like chickens and ducks – very sick and can kill them.

Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but this latest outbreak of bird flu has infected people, mainly in Southeast Asian countries. When the illness infects people, it is very serious and over half the people sick with bird flu have died. It has not been found in birds or people in the United States (as of Winter 2006).

People get bird flu from contact with infected birds. Infected birds shed the virus in saliva and feces droppings. A person can catch bird flu when an infected chicken coughs or sneezes onto a person's face, or when a person breathes in bird dropping particles.

People may also get the virus by eating undercooked poultry. You cannot get the virus by eating properly cooked poultry or eggs so be sure your poultry is fully cooked.

If you were exposed to bird flu, you could have symptoms for up to 14 days. Symptoms usually include the flu-like symptoms of fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches, shortness of breath and even eye infections. Serious cases of bird flu cause life-threatening breathing problems including pneumonia. It can even cause death.

Healthcare providers will treat patients depending on their symptoms. Depending on how serious the symptoms, treatment may include supportive care, use of anti-viral medicines, or even hospitalization.

Scientists and health professionals are concerned about bird flu because the current virus in birds may change and develop into a virus that will spread easily from one person to another, causing the next pandemic in humans. Because it is not possible to prevent or stop a pandemic once it begins, the pandemic flu can cause serious illness and death.

There is no vaccine for bird flu. To protect yourself against bird flu, health officials recommend you take the same steps you would to protect yourself against any other flu or cold. (See What You Can Do).

# WHAT YOU CAN DO

Preparing for a pandemic flu can reduce your chances of getting sick and help limit the spread of disease.

Stay healthy by eating a balanced diet, exercising daily, getting enough rest and drinking fluids. And get your seasonal flu shot.

Stay informed by keeping up-to-date on a possible pandemic by listening to radio & television, reading news stories and checking out the web.

These common-sense steps can help stop the spread of influenza germs:

- Wash hands frequently using soap and water.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues. Cough or sneeze into your sleeve. Put used tissues in the trash and then wash your hands.
- If you get sick, stay home and away from others as much as possible.
- Don't send sick children to school.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

## YOUR PANDEMIC FLU EMERGENCY KIT

As many as 1 in 4 people could get sick during a pandemic, with many of them seriously ill. Services and supplies we count on everyday may not be available. Every individual and family could be on their own, without care, for quite a while. This makes being prepared even more important.

Because everyday life may be different during a pandemic flu and services could be disrupted, make sure you have these items in your emergency preparedness kit.

- Two weeks worth of food for you and your family. This should be food that does not need refrigeration. Foods like canned meats and fish, beans, soups, fruits, and dry goods like flour, salt, and sugar, are good choices.
- Water stored in sealed, unbreakable containers. If water service is disrupted, plan on one gallon for each person for each day, for up to two weeks.
- Two weeks worth of prescription medicines.
- Two weeks worth of ibuprofen or acetaminophen (Tylenol) for each person in the house for fever and pain. A two-week supply of cough medicine.
- Rehydration Solution, for example Pedialyte for kids, Gatorade for adults and teens. Please see the box below for instructions to make a rehydration solution for adults and teens. For children, especially infants and toddlers, a store-bought solution is strongly recommended.
- Cell phone and charger.
- Supply of face masks and plastic gloves. These will help protect you, especially if you are taking care of family members who are sick with the disease.
- Disinfectants and chlorine bleach.

You can get more information on putting together a complete **Emergency Preparedness Plan** and **Kit** from the American Red Cross Massachusetts Bay Metro-West, 867 Main Street, Waltham, MA 02451, (781) 642-7000.

### Rehydration Solution for Adults & Teens

• 4 cups of clean water • 2 Tablespoons of sugar • 1/2 teaspoon of salt  
Mix all the ingredients until the sugar disappears. You can drink the solution at room temperature. Please note: Do not boil the solution because that will reduce the solution's helpfulness.

# Seasonal Flu vs Pandemic Flu

There are some key differences in how seasonal flu happens and how a pandemic flu happens.

## SEASONAL FLU

- Usually follows a predictable pattern, typically every year in the winter. There is usually some protection built up in a person from having the flu before.
- Healthy adults are not usually at risk for any serious complications.
- The medical community can usually meet public and patient needs.
- Vaccines are developed before the flu season, based on known virus strains.
- Supplies of antiviral drugs are usually available.
- Average number of deaths in the US is about 36,000 a year.
- Regular flu symptoms: fever, cough, runny nose, and muscle pain.
- A small impact on the community with sick people staying home from work and school.
- Small impact on US and world economy.

## PANDEMIC FLU

- Doesn't happen often – only three times in the 20th century. The last time was 1968. Since this new pandemic flu hasn't been seen before, there is no or little immunity.
- Healthy people may be at risk for serious complications.
- The medical community will be overwhelmed.
- Vaccine developed early may not be effective. Once an effective vaccine is developed, it may not be available for several months.
- May not have any effective antiviral drugs or the supply may be limited.
- The number of deaths would be much higher, worldwide it could be millions.
- Symptoms would be more serious and there would be more medical complications.
- Big impact on the community. There could be travel restrictions, school closings, limited business hours or closings, and cancellation of public gatherings.
- Could have a big impact on US and world economy.

LEARN MORE

### Keep up-to-date on a possible pandemic flu by listening to radio and television, and reading news stories about pandemic flu.

- Go to [www.mass.gov/dph/flu](http://www.mass.gov/dph/flu) for more information and Fact Sheets on Pandemic Flu, Avian Flu, and Isolation & Quarantine.
- Go to [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) for general information about pandemic flu and other health related information.
- Go to [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) for all the information you will need to make your own emergency preparation plan.
- Go to [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov) for updates on national and international pandemic flu.

### For Travel Information and Warnings

- Go to [www.cdc.gov/travel/destinat.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/destinat.htm) for health related travel information.
- Go to [www.who.int/](http://www.who.int/) for health related travel information and international disease outbreak information.
- Go to [http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel\\_1744.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel_1744.html) for general travel warnings.

Public Health Emergency Response



Preparing for  
Pandemic Flu

YOUR GUIDE TO

Your safety.  
That's why public  
health is working.

Because of the potential for a pandemic flu, the Public Health Department wants you to know more about this possible health threat. This guide includes basic information about pandemic flu, individual and family preparedness, as well as where you can get more information. To learn more about us, visit [www.region4a.org](http://www.region4a.org).



Public Health Emergency Response



# DURING A PANDEMIC FLU

Here are some things you will need to know about during a pandemic flu. Please remember, information will change during the pandemic and it will be important to keep up-to-date and follow public health orders.

## PUBLIC HEALTH INSTRUCTIONS

Throughout a pandemic flu you may be asked or required to do things to help hold back the spread of the disease in our community. If local public health officials or your healthcare provider ask you to take certain actions, follow those instructions.

Here are some examples of what you may be asked or required to do.

- When you are sick, stay home. Children should not go to school if they are sick. Staying home will be absolutely necessary during a pandemic flu to limit the spread of the disease.
- Even though you may be healthy, you could be asked to stay away from gatherings of people such as sporting events, movies and festivals. During a pandemic flu, these kinds of events could be cancelled because large gatherings of people help spread the flu virus.

Isolation and Quarantine are public health actions used to contain the spread of a contagious disease. If asked, it will be important to follow Isolation and/or Quarantine instructions.

**ISOLATION** is for people who are already ill. When someone is isolated, they are separated from people who are healthy. Having the sick person isolated (separated from others) can help to slow or stop the spread of disease. People who are isolated can be cared for in their homes, in hospitals, or in other healthcare facilities. Isolation is usually voluntary, but local, state and federal government have the power to require the isolation of sick people to protect the public.

**QUARANTINE** is for people who have been exposed to the disease but are not sick. When someone is placed in quarantine, they are also separated from others. Even though the person is not sick at the moment, they were exposed to the disease and may still become infectious and then spread the disease to others. Quarantine can help to slow or stop this from happening. States generally have the power to enforce quarantines within their borders.

# Prevent the Spread of Disease at Home



If you or a household member becomes ill during a pandemic flu and are being cared for at home, follow these instructions to control the spread of disease in the home.

### Isolate the ill person *WITHIN* your home.

- The person who is ill should not leave the house unless they are being taken to a medical appointment. The sick person will have to stay home for two weeks after their symptoms begin, even if they are feeling better. Do not have visitors while the person is sick.
- Designate a room(s) only for the ill person(s) so they are separated from other household members. The room(s) should have a door that can be closed.
- The ill person should wear a protective mask when anyone is in the same room or car. People in the room or car with the ill person should also wear a protective mask. Disposable gloves should be used when cleaning or disinfecting any room or area where the sick person has been.

### Wash hands with soap or use alcohol-based hand rubs.

- Everyone in the household - and it is important to remind children - should wash their hands with soap between contacts with others, before preparing food, and before eating.
- Wash hands after touching tissues or surfaces soiled with saliva or nose drainage.

### Keep the household environment clean.

- On a daily basis, clean surfaces and commonly shared items like micro-waves, refrigerator handles, phones, remote controls, doorknobs and handles, toilet seats and handles, faucets, light switches and toys. Use a labeled household disinfectant or chlorine bleach mixture (see below).
- Store brand chlorine bleach can be used as a disinfectant by mixing 1/4 cup chlorine bleach with 1 gallon of cool water.

### Cover noses and mouths when sneezing or coughing.

- Remind children and others to cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when sneezing or coughing, or to sneeze or cough into their sleeves. Put used tissues in a wastebasket, and then wash hands with soap or use an alcohol-based rub.
- Even when a person is wearing a mask, they should cough or sneeze into their sleeve.

### Watch all household members for symptoms of respiratory illness.

- Contact your healthcare provider if a fever or other symptoms such as chills, cough, sore throat, headache, or muscle aches develop.

### Make sure supplies are on-hand.

- Keep supplies of masks, gloves, soap, tissues, paper towels and cleaning supplies on hand.
- Make sure all sinks and restrooms are stocked with soap and paper towels.
- Make sure that tissues are available in all bedrooms and common areas like living, dining, family, and computer rooms.



# IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

The following are numbers for non-emergency calls and can provide disaster related assistance and preparedness information.

Public Safety Emergency Services .....	978-264-9638
Public Health Information Line .....	978-264-9634
Public Highway Information .....	978-265-9624

Please contact your Town Government about your Community Emergency Response Team (CERT).

## Your Own Important Numbers



Write down important numbers and keep them close. These include friends and family home and cellular numbers, your doctor or clinic, and your children's school.

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## GETTING INFORMATION

Local radio and television stations, as well as a number of web sites, will provide information during a pandemic flu. In some instances, specific emergency instructions will be broadcast by:



- ..... WROR - FM 105.7
- ..... WBZ - AM 1030
- ..... WEEI - AM 850

During a pandemic flu, emergency instructions may include ways to protect your health, as well as closings of schools and businesses, and canceling events.

# Where to Find Emergency Medical Care

During a pandemic flu, it will be important NOT to go to the hospital except in the case of a medical emergency. Hospitals will be overwhelmed with patients during a pandemic and many sick people may have to be cared for at home or at a non-hospital location.

### Hospitals

**Emerson Hospital**  
111 Old Nine Acre Road  
Concord, MA 01742  
978-369-1400  
www.emersonhospital.org

**Nashoba Valley Medical Center**  
200 Groton Road  
Ayer, MA 01432  
978-784-9000  
www.nashobamed.org

Call 911 only in the event of a serious, life-threatening emergency. But remember, because a pandemic flu could be bigger than any other health emergency, 911 may be overwhelmed by the number of calls.

## Acton is part of Public Health Region 4A

### Suggested Internet Sites

- [www.region4A.org](http://www.region4A.org)
- [www.region4A-MRC.org](http://www.region4A-MRC.org)
- [www.mass.gov/dph/flu](http://www.mass.gov/dph/flu)
- [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)
- [www.getprepared.org](http://www.getprepared.org)
- [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)
- [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- [www.town.acton.ma.us/](http://www.town.acton.ma.us/)



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