

## **Pandemic Influenza - Get Informed. Be Prepared.**

This information is presented to help you understand the threat of a pandemic influenza outbreak in our country and our community. It describes commonsense actions you can take now in preparing for a pandemic. The severity and location of the next pandemic outbreak cannot be predicted, but being prepared may help lower the impact of an influenza pandemic on you and your family. Additional information including a planning checklist for individuals and families can be found at the federal government's website [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov).

### **What You Need to Know**

An influenza (flu) pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of flu disease that occurs when a new type of influenza virus appears that people have not been exposed to before (or have not been exposed to in a long time). The pandemic virus can cause serious illness because people do not have immunity to the new virus; it is different from seasonal outbreaks which are seen every year.

Influenza pandemics are different from many of the other major public health and health care threats facing society today. A pandemic will last much longer than most flu outbreaks and may include "waves" of influenza activity that last 6-8 weeks separated by months. The number of health care workers and first responders able to work may be reduced. Public health officials will not know how severe a pandemic will be until it begins.

### **Importance and Benefits of Being Prepared**

The effects of a pandemic can be lessened if you prepare ahead of time. When a pandemic starts, everyone could be at risk. The United States has been working closely with other countries and the World Health Organization (WHO) to strengthen systems to detect outbreaks of influenza that might cause a pandemic.

Federal, state, and local governments are developing, improving, and testing their plans for an influenza pandemic. Businesses, schools, universities, and other faith-based and community organizations are also involved in the planning process.

As you begin your individual or family planning, you may want to review your state's planning efforts and those of your local public health and emergency preparedness officials. State plans and other planning information can be found at [www.pandemicflu.state.pa.us/pandemicflu](http://www.pandemicflu.state.pa.us/pandemicflu) .

For information on what the federal government is doing, visit the federal government's official Web site at [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov).

## **Pandemic Influenza - Challenges and Preparation**

You can start to prepare now to be able to respond to these challenges. The following are some challenges you or your family may face and recommendations to help you cope. In addition, checklists and other tools have been prepared to guide your planning efforts. A series of planning checklists can be found at [www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/checklists.html](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/checklists.html).

### **Essential Services You Depend on 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.

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 as well as a first-aid kit and non-prescription medications.

Transportation services may be disrupted and you may not be able to rely on public transportation. Plan to take fewer trips and store essential supplies.

Being able to work may be difficult or impossible. Ask your employer if there is a pandemic/disaster plan and how business will continue during a pandemic/disaster. Plan for possible loss of income if you are unable to work or the company you work for temporarily closes.

Schools, childcare, and universities may be closed to limit the spread of flu in the community and to help prevent children from becoming sick. Other school-related activities and services could also be disrupted or cancelled. For the "Childcare, School, and University Checklist," visit: [www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab5.html](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab5.html)

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.

Consider that the ability to travel, even by car if there are fuel shortages, may be limited.

In a pandemic, there may be widespread illness that could result in the shut down of local ATMs and banks. Keep a small amount of cash in small denominations for easy use.

In a severe pandemic, hospitals, ambulance services, and doctors' offices will be overwhelmed. Make sure you have necessary medical supplies. More information regarding medical care can be found at:

[www.pandemicflu.gov/planguide/familyhealthinfo.html](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/planguide/familyhealthinfo.html)

## **Pandemic Influenza - Prevention**

### Stay Healthy

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

- **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.
- **Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze**-throw the tissue away immediately after you use it.
- 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.

### Vaccination

It is recommended that you get a yearly flu vaccination, especially those individuals at high risk. This may not prevent you from getting the pandemic form of the flu but it may offer some limited protection.

### Stay Informed

- Look for additional information on the PA Health Department's website, [www.pandemicflu.state.pa.us/pandemicflu](http://www.pandemicflu.state.pa.us/pandemicflu) and the federal government's website at [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov).
- Listen to local and national radio, watch news reports on television, and read your newspaper and other sources of printed and web-based information.