

frequently asked questions

What is pandemic flu?

Pandemic flu is a global outbreak of disease that occurs when a new influenza A virus appears or “emerges” in the human population, causes serious illness, and then spreads easily from person to person worldwide. Past influenza pandemics have led to high levels of illness, death, social disruptions and economic loss.



For a flu pandemic to occur, three conditions must be met:

- An new influenza A virus appears or “emerges” in the human population
- The new virus must cause serious illness in people
- The new virus is spread easily from person to person worldwide

Has pandemic flu occurred before?

Pandemic flu is not a new disease in our nation’s history. In the 20th century alone the United States experienced three pandemic flu outbreaks, one in 1918-1919, one in 1957-1958 and the most recent one in 1968-1969. Over half a million Americans died in the 1918 pandemic, 70,000 in the 1957 pandemic and 34,000 in the 1968 pandemic.

How can I prevent pandemic flu?

The best way to gain protection from any flu is to be vaccinated. Unfortunately there currently is no vaccine for a future pandemic because the strain of virus that causes the pandemic has not emerged. In general a good way to prevent sickness and the spread of germs is to practice good hygiene by:

- Washing your hands regularly and thoroughly. You should scrub your hands for as long as it takes you to sing happy birthday twice, about 20 seconds. Dry your hands thoroughly with a paper towel and use it to turn off the water. Using a shared towel can spread germs.
- Sneezing and coughing into your sleeve if you do not have a tissue. Try not to cough into your hands because this spreads germs more easily. If you use a tissue to cough or sneeze into, throw it away immediately.
- Staying home from work and/or school when you are sick. This may spare your co-workers and classmates from getting sick too.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Often germs are spread by touching something contaminated and transferring them to your face.
- Cleaning surfaces in your house with bleach water or store bought disinfectant. Mix 10 parts water to one part bleach and scrub counter tops, sinks, doorknobs and light switches.



How can I prepare for pandemic flu?

Make a plan now for a flu pandemic. Figure out what you will do if members of your household have to stay home from work or school. Keep extra supplies of food, water, medications and a disaster supply kit on hand. For more details about what to store in your pandemic flu supply kit visit www.columbuspandemicflu.com and review the Ready in Three publication and the Ohio Department of Health’s suggestions.

How will health care professionals care for me during a pandemic?

During a pandemic, health care facilities will likely be overwhelmed and may only be able to treat the patients in the worse conditions. Therefore it is important to have the supplies you need available at home to care for your loved ones should they become sick. For more information read the Red Cross Home Care for Pandemic Flu information sheet available at www.columbuspandemicflu.com.

Can I be vaccinated against the pandemic?

As with any flu virus, a vaccine is the most effective way to gain protection against the pandemic flu. But, for a flu virus to be considered a pandemic it must be a completely new strain of influenza. Therefore, until the actual strain of flu that causes a pandemic emerges, vaccine cannot be fully developed.



What over the counter medications can I take to help pandemic flu symptoms?

Medications that you would take to help with symptoms for seasonal flu may help with pandemic flu, such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen, fever-relief and nausea medication.

How do I take care of someone who has the flu?

Since all types of flu are spread by germs that live in the mouth and nose of an infected person it is important to follow these guidelines to protect all loved ones:

- Keep everyone's personal items separated. Avoid sharing computers, pens, paper, clothes, towels, sheets, blankets, food and eating utensils.
- Disinfect door knobs, switches, handles, toys and other surfaces that are commonly touched around the home or workplace.
- Wear disposable gloves when in contact with or cleaning up body fluids.
- Choose one person to be the caregiver. He or she may benefit by wearing a mask when giving care.

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Is Avian Flu a pandemic?

Currently, Avian Flu (H5N1) virus in humans is very limited and not a pandemic. Genetic studies confirm that the H5N1 influenza virus mutates rapidly and should it adapt to allow easy human-to-human transmission, a pandemic could occur.



What sort of impact will be caused by a pandemic?

A worldwide flu pandemic could have a major effect on the global economy, including travel, trade, tourism, food, consumption and eventually, investment and financial markets. Therefore, planning for pandemic flu by businesses is essential to minimize a pandemic's impact. In addition, health care facilities will be overwhelmed. Illness rates will soar and many people will require some form of medical care. Symptoms may be severe and complications more frequent. Healthy people may be at an increased risk for complications. During a pandemic there will be limited to no assistance from state and federal governments due to nationwide impact

How will the health department respond to a pandemic?

The local health departments are building on National and State guidance on how to prepare for a pandemic. Local health departments are planning with health care providers and hospitals for mass care and mass casualties. The local health department will monitor the current status of the pandemic and do whatever possible to limit the spread of the outbreak. Finally, should a vaccine become available, the local health department would organize the efforts to disseminate and administer the vaccination to the entire population.



Created by the Central Ohio Public Information Network for Pandemic Flu

For more information contact kjsmith@franklincountyohio.gov or visit www.columbuspandemicflu.com

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