



Together, we can save a life

FACT SHEET

Pandemic Influenza

Influenza, often called the flu, is a respiratory disease caused by a virus. In the United States, the flu is an annual event that begins in December and ends in March. This type of flu is called Seasonal Flu. Rarely, a new type of flu virus may appear that people have not been exposed to before, so they have no natural resistance to it. This type of virus could cause a flu more serious than a seasonal or “typical” flu. This flu is called Pandemic Flu. This type of flu spreads easily from person to person around the world in a very short time and causes serious illness and deaths.

Currently, experts have discovered a new type of flu virus that has infected and killed many birds. This virus causes a flu called Avian or Bird Flu. In Asia and Turkey infected birds (domesticated chickens, ducks and turkeys) have transmitted the bird flu to humans causing illness and sometimes death. Although there has been no sustained human-to-human transmission, there has been growing concern that a flu pandemic could occur. Unlike the seasonal flu, pandemic flu infects large numbers of people of all ages, causing serious illness and deaths. Whether or not a flu pandemic actually occurs, you can prepare by knowing the facts about the flu and how to respond to it.

The symptoms of the bird flu, which are similar to those of the seasonal flu, are:

- Diarrhea;
- Extreme tiredness;
- Headache;
- Body ache;
- Cough;
- Sore throat;
- Fever and chills;
- Runny or stuffy nose.

Contact your health care provider if you have any questions about your specific symptoms.

You can make good hygiene a habit and take other actions to prevent the spread of germs, including:

- Washing your hands with soap and water or cleaning them with a hand sanitizer.
- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and cleaning your hands afterwards. Use soap and water or a hand sanitizer.
- Staying home if you are sick. Get plenty of rest and drink a lot of fluids.
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick.
- Keeping your living and work areas clean.

During a flu pandemic, public health officials may impose community-level restrictions to prevent the flu virus from spreading. You may be asked to stay home for an extended period of time even though you are not sick. Schools, workplaces and places of worship may be closed temporarily and mass transportation such as subways, trains and air travel may be limited.

You can prepare for a flu pandemic now. These actions may lessen the impact of a flu pandemic on you and your family —

- Store extra supplies of water and food.
- Ask your doctor and insurance company if you can get an extra supply of your regular prescription drugs.
- Store a supply of non-prescription drugs such as pain relievers, cough and cold medicines, stomach remedies, fluids with electrolytes and vitamins.
- Store health supplies such as bleach, tissues, a thermometer, disposable gloves, soap and alcohol-based hand cleaners.
- Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got sick.

For more information, please visit www.redcross.org, www.pandemicflu.gov, www.cdc.gov, www.hhs.gov and www.who.int.
