

# Preparing for an Influenza Pandemic

Influenza is an illness caused by viruses that infect the respiratory tract of humans. This virus can cause sudden illness among humans in all age groups on a global scale. This highly contagious disease is spread through contact with droplets from the nose or mouth of an infected person. The time between exposure and onset of illness is one to five days. The signs and symptoms of influenza are rapid onset high fever, chills, sore throat, runny nose, severe headache, nonproductive cough, and intense body aches followed by extreme fatigue.

Seasonal influenza occurs annually between October and April. It causes more than 36,000 deaths and 200,000 hospitalizations every year in the United States. The most vulnerable people are the elderly, young children and, the immunocompromised (taking HIV medications, chemotherapy, or those who have had a transplant).

Avian flu also known as bird flu is caused by an influenza virus that occurs among wild birds. It has been transmitted from birds to humans who live in close contact with them. There is no evidence that anyone has caught it from properly cooked eggs or poultry. Of the lab confirmed human cases so far, over half have been fatal. No cases have been reported in the United States to date.

When an Avian Influenza virus transforms itself into a virus that can be easily passed human to human, it can lead to a pandemic. The "Spanish Flu" of 1918-19 caused more than 20 million deaths worldwide. Similar pandemics of 1957 and 1968 had lower mortality rates due to antibiotic therapy for secondary bacterial infections and aggressive supportive care of infected individuals.

As a precaution, federal health officials are currently watching the global situation closely and advising communities to begin planning now for an eventual outbreak. Even though the influenza pandemics are expected, they are unpredictable and will arrive with very little warning.

## So what can you do to prepare?

1. Make an emergency kit that includes:
  - a. One gallon of water per person per day or at least 3 days for drinking and sanitation.
  - b. At least a three day supply of non-perishable food and a can opener if kit contains canned food. Ex. Canned soup, stew, fruits, vegetables, cereal, protein bars, crackers, canned juice, peanut butter, baby food if needed, pet food if needed.
  - c. Medications and medical supplies including pain relief medications such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines, fluids with electrolytes, and vitamins.
2. Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got sick, or what will be needed to care for them in your home.
3. Know where to get reliable information as the incident unfolds and follow instructions provided by governmental public health authorities.
4. To limit the spread of germs and prevent infection:
  - a. Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water.
  - b. Cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough.
  - c. Avoid touching your face.
  - d. Stay home when you are sick.
  - e. Start now to change your habits. Whether or not there is a pandemic, you will likely experience fewer illnesses and have a healthier life.

These websites have a tremendous amount of reliable information on Avian and Pandemic Influenza.

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian>

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov>

<http://www.bergenhealth.org>

<http://www.nj.pandemicflu.gov>

<http://www.usda.gov>

<http://www.redcross.org/news/ds/panflu>

Northwest Bergen Regional Health Commission  
20 West Prospect Street  
Waldwick, NJ 07463  
201-445-7217