

Get The Facts

# Pandemic Flu

**Pandemic Flu:** It's not the flu you're used to.

**Unlike the flu that goes around every year, pandemic flu is different.** A pandemic of flu occurs when a new flu virus our bodies haven't come across before spreads around the world, causing serious illness and possibly death. It spreads easily from one person to another, and can infect an entire community in a matter of days. In the past 100 years, we have seen three pandemics—in 1918, 1957 and 1968. We're overdue for another pandemic. *It's not a question of if, but when.*

## Get the Facts on Pandemic Flu

**Pandemic flu causes more sickness and deaths than annual flu, already a serious health threat.** Every year, more than 200,000 people in the U.S. have to go to the hospital because of seasonal flu, and 36,000 die from it. HHS estimates that if a severe flu pandemic like that of 1918 were to occur in the U.S., over 1.9 million people could die, with 9.9 million individuals hospitalized. Even in a better scenario, if the U.S. were to encounter a moderate flu pandemic like those of 1957 and 1968, 209,000 people could die, with 865,000 hospitalized.

**There is currently no vaccine to protect the public from pandemic flu.** The annual flu vaccine will not protect the public from a pandemic strain of influenza. The United States does not yet have the capacity to produce enough vaccine for the public in a timely manner after a pandemic is declared. A goal stated in the Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza is, within 5 years, to have the domestic vaccine production capacity necessary to be able to provide vaccine for the entire U.S. population within 6 months after the development of a vaccine reference strain

**Antivirals will be available, but will be in short supply and may not be effective.** Although antiviral drugs are oftentimes effective at reducing the severity of flu complications, influenza strains can become resistant to them, making them useless. Therefore, our national response strategy should not solely depend on the widespread dissemination of antivirals.

**Prudent public health practices will be key.** To keep from getting or spreading the flu, such practices as hand washing, staying home from work or school if you are sick, covering your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing and avoiding close contact with those who are sick will be essential.

**State and local health departments cannot be prepared without adequate resources.** Although local health departments will be the first responders to outbreaks of avian or pandemic flu, states and localities have insufficient resources to be able to prepare and respond effectively.

**A flu pandemic will exacerbate the already existing health workforce shortage.** Already, state and local health departments are experiencing critical workforce shortages, especially in the public health nursing, epidemiology, environmental health and public health laboratory science and technology professions. These professions will be especially critical in tracking the spread of flu and testing for new human cases of the virus. With an expected 40% absentee rate during a flu pandemic, hospitals and medical care facilities—already short of nurses and physicians—will be especially strained.

**It is safe to eat chicken and eggs.** Avian flu, which oftentimes does cause pandemics, is not spread through properly cooked food. According to the USDA, chicken should be cooked to a minimum temperature of 165 °F throughout to be safe to eat. Eating raw eggs is also discouraged; raw eggs should only be used in recipes for foods such as cookies that people will fully cook.



## Questions to Ask the Public So They Are Prepared

A flu pandemic may cause schools, businesses, grocery stores and other places that are part of our daily life to shut down. To prepare, individuals and families should consider many issues, including:

- What should you do if your children's school or childcare center closes because of pandemic flu?
- What would you do if grocery stores and pharmacies closed? Do you have enough food and water at home to feed yourself and your family for at least two weeks? What about your medications?
- If a flu pandemic strikes, how will you care for family members at home, including those with serious or long-term illness?
- Would you be able to use sick leave or work from home if you needed to?
- Does your workplace have a plan for how to respond if a flu pandemic or other disaster strikes and do you know what that plan is?

## Economic Impact of Pandemic Flu

- International trade and travel may be restricted if not stopped altogether.
- Many businesses, if operating at all, will be functioning at a minimum level due to high expected absentee rates and likely supply chain disruptions.
- According to the Congressional Budget Office, pandemic influenza has the potential to reduce gross domestic product by 1.5–6%.
- Pandemic flu can be more devastating than World War II to the nation's economy in terms of the economic recession it is likely to cause.

## Legislative Activities APHA Is Supporting

During the past two years, the Bush Administration has released the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza, the HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan and the Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza. Although APHA believes these documents are blueprints that can be used as the nation moves forward to prepare for pandemic flu, they are insufficient to ensure that states and localities are sufficiently prepared to respond.

**APHA supports a \$1.2 billion appropriation for fiscal year 2008 to help the nation prepare for pandemic influenza.** Ultimately, pandemic flu preparedness should go hand-in-hand with everyday public health activities. Programs such as public health workforce development, immunization and chronic disease prevention programs cannot be neglected to pay for pandemic flu preparedness.

**APHA supports full funding of the Covered Countermeasures Process Fund.** An adequate compensation fund would ensure that people who receive countermeasures—such as vaccines—and become ill, disabled or die, receive compensation for their losses. Without such a fund, first responders and the public will hesitate to receive such countermeasures, as was witnessed during the smallpox vaccination campaign. This fund would also provide increased certainty for industry as it would guarantee demand for countermeasures, as people will be more likely to get vaccinated and receive a countermeasure if they have some protection against the worst-case scenario.

