

Pandemic Flu Preparedness

The **mission of the American Red Cross** is helping people prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies. The Red Cross not only responds to tens of thousands of disasters each year, but also has responded to many public health emergencies in the past such as the **influenza pandemic** of 1918.

Scientists have informed organizations in the U.S. and abroad about the significant possibility of an influenza (flu) pandemic occurring. Even though they cannot accurately predict when the next **pandemic** will occur, or whether the **avian influenza (H5N1)** virus will cause the next human pandemic, scientists all agree that the best action the public can take now to prepare.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is constantly on the look out for the first signs of a flu pandemic. At first sign, the WHO will take immediate steps to try to contain it. Once a flu pandemic affects other countries, it will reach the United States. With the popularity of air travel, the chances of it reaching the U.S. sooner are increased.

The WHO will inform governments worldwide when a flu pandemic starts. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will make announcements in the U.S. advising the best course of action – using television, radio, print and the internet throughout different phases of a pandemic.

The Red Cross works with organizations such as the WHO and CDC, and at this time has taken on the role of working with communities across the country on flu pandemic education. As an organization that connects individuals and families to important preparedness information every day, the Red Cross continues to develop flu pandemic materials that can be easily understood and applied in your community and household.

- ▶ To get more information on the Red Cross flu pandemic efforts or to get involved in raising awareness of the flu pandemic, **contact your local Red Cross chapter.**

Learning the Facts

influenza, also known as the flu, is a contagious respiratory disease caused by viruses.

In the United States, there is a flu season that begins every fall and ends every spring. The type of flu people get during this season is called **seasonal flu**.

Sometimes, a new type of flu virus may emerge to which the general public has no resistance. The lack of immunity enables the virus to spread quickly and easily from person to person impacting communities around the world in a very short time, causing serious illness and death. This kind of flu is called **pandemic flu**.

The exact symptoms of pandemic flu are unknown. However, the CDC notes that symptoms are expected to be similar to those of seasonal flu, which include:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Extreme fatigue
- Headache
- Muscle aches and pains
- Stomach problems, such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children)

- ▶ Visit the CDC's "[Key Facts about Influenza and the Influenza Vaccine](#)" page for more detailed flu symptom information.

Research suggests that it may take two to seven days to show symptoms when a person catches the flu, and the symptoms may last for up to a week.

A person infected with the flu may transmit the flu for one to two days before they have symptoms, and for five to seven days after symptoms begin.

- ▶ Contact a health care provider if you have any questions about specific symptoms.

Why the concern over pandemic flu?

Pandemic flu is more serious than seasonal flu. Most people who get seasonal flu recover within a week or two and usually do not require medical treatment. Pandemic flu is different because more people who get it might not recover, even with medical treatment, and people of every age may be at risk of serious illness or death.

Who is more at risk?

The very young, the very old and the very sick are most likely to become seriously ill from any form of the flu virus.

What about a vaccine?

Unlike seasonal flu, there is no **vaccine** for pandemic flu until researchers and pharmaceutical companies are able to create one, which takes time. Even if a vaccine is developed for the pandemic flu, it will be a challenge to manufacture and dispense the vaccine to everyone in a timely manner.

When will this happen? Can I do something now?

Scientists cannot accurately predict whether the avian influenza virus (H5N1) will cause the next human pandemic flu or when the next pandemic will occur.

The best way to protect yourself and others is to practice healthy hygiene to keep you well now and during a flu pandemic. Practicing these actions now will make them easier to do later. These actions include washing your hands, covering your cough and staying home when you are sick to slow the spread of illness.

For more information

- Family Preparedness Guide Fact Sheet
 - [English](#) [PDF]
 - [Español](#) [PDF]
- [CDC: Key Facts about Influenza and the Influenza Vaccine](#)

Planning Ahead

During a flu pandemic, government officials may be required to limit community movement or impose travel restrictions to help prevent the flu virus from spreading. Things to keep in mind:

- You may be asked to stay home for an extended period of time even if you are not sick.
- Schools, workplaces and public gatherings such as sporting events or worship services may close temporarily.
- Mass transportation such as subways, buses, trains and air travel may be limited.
- You, your family and friends may need to rely on each other when you cannot depend on the services you normally use.

Think about how you handle stress and know your strengths. Take steps to plan for, get through and recover from a flu pandemic...

Planning at Home

- Store a two-week supply of food. Select foods that do not require refrigeration, preparation or cooking. Ensure that formula for infants and any child's or older person's special nutritional needs are a part of your planning. Plan for your pets as well.
- Store a two-week supply of water, 1 gallon of water per person per day, in clean plastic containers. Avoid using containers that will decompose or break, such as milk cartons or glass bottles.
- Store a supply of nonprescription drugs, such as pain relievers, cough and cold medicines, stomach remedies and anti-diarrheal medication, as well as vitamins and fluids with electrolytes (such as sports drinks).
- Store health and cleaning supplies, such as bleach, tissues, a thermometer, disposable gloves, soap and alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Ask your health care provider and health insurance company if you can get an extra supply of your regular prescription drugs and medical supplies, such as glucose monitoring supplies.
- Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got sick.



Along with food, water and medical supplies, store cleaning supplies such as bleach with household emergency supplies.

Planning in Your Community

- Ask about plans to enable you to stay home if you are or a family member is sick.
- Find out your employer's plans to keep the business open if key staff can't come to work.
- Find out now about your child's school or daycare provider's plans for handling a flu pandemic.
- Ask if there are plans to encourage sick children to stay home to reduce the spread of the disease.
- Ask if there are plans to close during a pandemic that would require all the children to remain at home.

Finding out the answers ahead of time will have a significant impact on your plans and decisions during a flu pandemic.

Related Content

- [Build an emergency supplies kit](#)
- [Food and Water in an Emergency \(A5055\) \(FEMA 477\)](#)
- [Water storage before disaster strikes](#)
- [Water sources during an emergency](#)
- [Water treatment](#)
- [Food supplies in case of disaster](#)
- [Food supplies during an emergency](#)
- [Food safety \(without power\)](#)

Taking Action

An influenza pandemic could significantly impact you and your family...

- You may need to reorganize your life to care for loved ones or to receive care.
- You may lose income if your workplace closes or you become ill.
- School closures can result in the need for home-schooling or other activities for homebound children.
- Access to food and other household goods may become limited.
- Healthcare services may be overwhelmed and/or difficult to access.

Empowering yourself by taking the following positive steps will significantly affect your own response to a flu pandemic in your community. Some simple but vital steps to getting prepared include...

Get prepared for a pandemic

- ▶ Download PDF versions or obtain printed copies of the following brochures by contacting [your local Red Cross chapter](#):

- Family Preparedness Guide Fact Sheet - Available in [English](#) and [Español](#) [PDFs]
- [Preparing for a Flu Pandemic: Coping and Emotional Well-being](#) [PDF]
- [Pandemic Flu: Self-study presentation](#) [PDF]

Learn what to expect during a flu pandemic

- Many people are likely to become ill at the same time.
- Infected people may be physically isolated, which means they are separated from healthy people to reduce the chances of spreading the flu.
- People who have been exposed to the virus may be quarantined.
- Public transportation, gathering places, events, schools and businesses may shut down, close or be canceled.
- Community services and utilities may be disrupted.
- Health care services could become overwhelmed.

Stay informed

- Stay tuned to news and media reports on the status of a pandemic
- Seek information on public services you use that may close and make a plan for alternatives ahead of time.
- Follow updates provided by local public health authorities and personal health care providers.

Stay connected

Collect and keep track of important contact information for people you may need to reach during a flu pandemic. This will ensure that you are able to contact them by telephone, e-mail and other means should you be unable to travel due to movement restriction measures.

Stay healthy

Learn and practice these healthy actions now to make them a healthy habit later and help slow the spread of illnesses:

- Wash your hands often and correctly.
- Cover your cough.
- Stay home when you are sick.

Help Educate Others

Interested in working with the Red Cross to promote preparedness information?

Resources are available via a presentation titled: "Pandemic Flu Public Information Series - Are You Prepared?" This presentation is appropriate for workplaces, communities and families. Its content includes:

- What to expect during a flu pandemic
- The differences between seasonal flu and pandemic flu
- How the influenza virus spreads
- Steps to help prevent the spread of the flu
- How to prepare for a flu pandemic

▶ To obtain and offer the "Pandemic Flu Public Information Series - Are You Prepared?" presentation, please visit the Red Cross [Instructor's Corner](#). [Registration Required]

Interested in learning more?

American Red Cross chapters across the country offer classes titled "Pandemic Flu Public Information Series – Are You Prepared?" that include an [informational video](#). Community classes are approximately one hour in length and contain information regarding individual preparedness – as well as brochures and worksheets.

- ▶ Preview the video [Pandemic Flu Public Information Series – Are You Prepared?](#) online. [Flash required. Video launches in a new window and takes a moment to load.]

Related Links:

- [Find and contact your local Red Cross chapter](#)
- [American Red Cross Instructor's Corner](#)

Staying Healthy

There are some actions that everyone can practice to slow the spread of the flu and reduce its impact, whether the viruses involved are seasonal or pandemic flu. Practicing these actions now will make them easier to do later.

Hand Washing

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- Wash your hands with soap and water or clean them with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Wash hands for at least 15 seconds. This will reduce the chance of spreading flu from one person to another.
- For visibly soiled hands, first wash with soap and warm water. When using soap and water:
 - Wet hands with water and apply an amount of soap recommended by the manufacturer to hands
 - Rub hands together vigorously for at least 15 seconds, covering all surfaces of the hands and giving added attention to fingernails and surfaces where jewelry is worn
 - Rinse hands with water
 - Dry thoroughly with a disposable towel
 - Use towel to turn off faucet
- For hands that are not visibly soiled, wash with soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60 percent to 95 per alcohol) or do both. When using hand sanitizer:
 - Use the amount of sanitizer directed in the instructions on the product
 - Rub thoroughly over all surfaces of the hands, including nail areas and between the fingers.
 - Continue to rub until product dries



Frequent and proper hand washing can reduce or prevent the spread of the flu.

Other Healthy Habits

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and clean your hands afterwards.
 - Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (as above).
 - If you don't have a tissue or handkerchief, cough or sneeze into the inside of your elbow or upper arm.
 - Whenever possible, avoid coughing or sneezing into your hands.
- Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth to keep flu germs from entering your body.
- Stay home if you are feeling sick. Get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluids.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. The flu virus is spread by respiratory droplets passed from one person to another. These droplets can pass among people in close contact.
- Avoid sharing objects—such as utensils, cups, bottles and telephones. If you must share, disinfect the objects before and after using them.
- Keep your living and work areas clean.

For More Information

- Family Preparedness Guide Fact Sheet
 - [English](#) [PDF]
 - [Español](#) [PDF]

Caring for Others

If you or someone in your household becomes sick, decide how the person will be cared for ahead of time:

- Talk about how giving care for pandemic flu will be different from other times when a family member is sick.
- Plan now to care for yourself or for others who get the flu.
- Talk about how you or someone else in the household would handle staying home from work, school or other activities to give or receive care.



If you or someone in your household becomes sick, decide how the person will be cared for ahead of time.

The following actions can help prevent the spread of the pandemic flu through your household when someone is sick:

- Designate one person as the caregiver.
- Keep everyone's personal items separate. All household members should avoid sharing pens, papers, clothes, towels, sheets, blankets, food or eating utensils unless cleaned between uses.
- Disinfect doorknobs, switches, handles, computers, telephones, toys and other surfaces that are commonly touched around the home or workplace.
- Wash everyone's dishes in the dishwasher or by hand using very hot water and soap.
- Wash everyone's clothes in a standard washing machine as you normally would. Use detergent and very hot water, and wash your hands after handling dirty laundry.
- Wear disposable gloves when in contact with or cleaning up body fluids.

For more information

- Home Care for Pandemic Flu
 - [English](#) [PDF]
 - [Español](#) [PDF]
- Family Preparedness Guide Factsheet
 - [English](#) [PDF]
 - [Español](#) [PDF]
- [Preparing for a Flu Pandemic Pandemic: Coping and Emotional Well-being](#) [PDF]

Glossary of Terms

Antiviral
Avian Influenza
Bird Flu
Epidemic
Flu

H5N1
Influenza
Influenza Pandemic
Isolation
Pandemic

Pandemic Influenza Quarantine
Seasonal Influenza
Social Distancing
Vaccine

Antiviral	A medication that may be used to treat people who have been infected by a virus to help limit the impact of some symptoms and reduce the potential for serious complications. People who are in high risk groups are often given antiviral drugs because of their increased potential to develop additional health issues.
Avian Influenza (bird flu)	Commonly known as bird flu, this strain of influenza virus is naturally occurring in birds. Wild birds can carry the virus and may not get sick from it; however, domestic birds may become infected by the virus and often die from it.
Epidemic	The rapid spread of a disease that infects some or many people in a community or region at the same time.
H5N1	<p>The scientific name for a subtype of the avian influenza (bird flu) virus that has spread from birds to humans.</p> <p>The scientific names for these subtypes are classified by different proteins on the virus. New subtypes naturally occur when the proteins change.</p>
Influenza (flu)	A contagious respiratory illness caused by particular strains of viruses.
Influenza Pandemic	A global outbreak of the influenza disease that occurs when a new influenza virus appears in the human population. Because people have little or no immunity to the new strain, serious illness can occur, and the virus can spread easily and rapidly from person to person with no vaccine immediately available.
Isolation	The physical separation of a person suffering from an infectious or contagious disease from others in a community.
Pandemic	An outbreak of a disease that affects large numbers of throughout the world.
Pandemic Influenza	a virulent influenza (flu) caused by a new flu virus strain to which humans have not been exposed. It is more serious than a typical seasonal flu because there is no natural resistance or immunity to it and infects large numbers of people of different ages all over the world, causing serious illness and possibly death.
Quarantine	The physical separation of healthy people who have been exposed to an infectious disease—for a period of time—from those who have not been exposed.
Seasonal Flu	A contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza (flu) viruses occurring every year. It affects an average of 5 to 20 percent of the U.S. population by causing mild to severe illness, and in some instances can lead to death. Most people have some immunity, and a vaccine is available.
Social Distancing	A disease prevention strategy in which a community imposes limits on social (face-to-face) interaction to reduce exposure to and transmission of a disease. These limitations could include, but are not limited to, school and work closures, cancellation of public gatherings and closure or limited mass transportation.
Vaccine	An injection, usually of an innocuous (weak or killed) form of the virus, that stimulates the production of antibodies by the immune system to help prevent or create resistance to an infection. Vaccines are usually given as a preventive measure.