

# Pandemic Flu FAQ's

## *What is Pandemic Flu?*

Pandemic flu is a world-wide outbreak of flu in humans that occurs when a new form of flu virus infects humans and is easily spread from person-to-person. Because a pandemic flu virus is unique, people have no immunity, or resistance to it.

Three prior flu pandemics occurred in the 20th century, in 1918 ("Spanish Flu"), 1957 ("Asian Flu"), and 1968 ("Hong Kong Flu").

Currently, there is no pandemic flu involving sustained human to human infection occurring anywhere in the world. Experts however, predict that another pandemic will occur at some point in the future.

## *Why is there concern about a potential flu pandemic?*



There is a current outbreak of a type of avian flu referred to as H5N1 that has been confirmed among poultry and other birds. There have been a number of humans with H5N1 in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and other areas overseas. Most of these cases resulted from direct or close contact with infected poultry. Spread of avian flu from person-to-person has been very limited.

At this time, the concern is that the avian flu virus (H5N1) might change in such a way that it would be able to spread easily from person-to-person. This might result in a pandemic.

Currently, the avian flu H5N1 virus does not spread easily from person-to-person.

## *If there is a flu pandemic, how will it affect me?*

In the event of a pandemic, it is anticipated that many people will need to stay home from work and school because they are sick or need to care for sick family members.

In an extreme situation, authorities may try "social distancing" and require that large events or gatherings of people (classes, sporting events, movie theaters, etc.) be cancelled or closed to prevent the spread of disease.

If a severe flu pandemic occurs, all business would likely be affected. Schools and business may decide to close temporarily. Public transportation might be limited.

If many people become sick at the same time, health-care facilities may become overwhelmed.

Individuals, families, business and schools should all prepare for the potential of a flu pandemic.



## *How can I prepare for a potential flu pandemic?*

Educate yourself.

Plan ahead. Planning and preparation can reduce the impact of any emergency or disaster. The Allegany County Health Department website, <http://www.alleganyhealthdepartment.com>, contains more information on emergency preparedness and pandemic flu.

Make a plan so that dependents and pets can be looked after for several weeks if their caregiver becomes ill.

The internet is an excellent source of information. Other ways to stay informed are the newspaper, radio, and written handouts.

If you take essential medications regularly, consider talking to your health-care provider about the possibility of keeping extra supplies or prescription medications to use in the event of a flu pandemic.

Keep enough essential goods on hand in case supplies are limited.



- Keep two weeks of food that does not need to be refrigerated.
- Keep two weeks of water (14 gallons per person) in sealed containers that cannot break.
- Keep two weeks worth of ibuprofen or acetaminophen (Tylenol) on hand to help with fever and pain.
- Keep a supply of surgical masks and plastic gloves to prevent spreading the flu.
- Keep disinfectants, chlorine bleach, and hand sanitizer on hand.

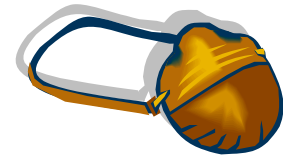
### ***Will a mask protect me from pandemic flu?***

At this time, it is not known with certainty that wearing a mask will prevent someone from getting the flu.

In a flu pandemic, people who are sick should wear surgical masks to help protect others from the flu. People who are sick should also use masks if they absolutely must leave their house, to help protect others.

Hospital and health care workers have a lot of exposure to people who are very sick. They should use a special type of mask called an N-95 respirator.

N-95 respirators protect best against the flu if they are carefully fitted and properly used.



### ***What else might be done to protect people in a flu pandemic?***

Government officials could ask you to try "social distancing" to slow the spread of the flu pandemic. You could be asked to stay home from work or school, and major events may be cancelled.

"Stay at home" days are meant to limit contact between people. If schools or businesses are closed, STAY HOME and keep your children at home.

### ***Will the government quarantine people in a flu pandemic?***

Quarantine and isolation are public health actions that are used to stop or slow the spread of a contagious disease (one that spreads easily from person-to-person) like pandemic flu. Quarantine and isolation both keep people away from others, in homes, hospitals, or non-health care facilities.

Quarantine is for people who have been exposed to a contagious disease, but are not sick. Sometimes people can spread the disease even before they feel sick. Quarantine separates the exposed person from other people for the amount of time that it would take to get sick after an exposure.

Isolation is for people who are already sick and could spread the disease.

Quarantine and isolation are usually voluntary. Most people want to protect others from getting sick. But the government does have the authority to make someone stay in isolation and quarantine.

### ***Is there a vaccine ("flu shot") for pandemic flu?***



A flu vaccine (also know as a "flu shot") against pandemic flu is not available at this time. Experts do not expect a vaccine to be widely available until several months after the start of a flu pandemic.

### ***What medications are available for a flu pandemic?***

There is no cure for the flu. Because flus are caused by viruses, antibiotic treatment (which works against bacteria) is ineffective. There is concern about the potential for flu viruses to become resistant to antiviral medications. The use of antivirals when they are not needed increases the chance that flu viruses will become resistant. Antivirals should not be taken without instructions from a doctor or other healthcare provider.

### ***Will there be enough antiviral medications in the event of a flu pandemic?***

In a flu pandemic, it is unlikely that there will be enough antiviral medications for everyone to prevent people from getting the flu or to treat everyone who does get the flu.

Federal, state, and local agencies are developing plans for obtaining, distributing, and using antiviral medications in case of pandemic flu. These plans are designed to keep essential services functioning (such as water, health, police, fire, and sanitation).



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