

Pandemic Influenza

Frequently Asked Questions



1. What's the difference between a pandemic flu outbreak and just a bad flu season?

- Influenza pandemics are explosive global events in which most, if not all, people worldwide are at risk for infection and illness.
- In an influenza pandemic, there is a new *strain* of influenza against which there is little or no natural resistance or immunity in humans, and until it can be developed, no vaccine.
- Seasonal flu outbreaks, even bad ones, are caused by variations of influenza viruses that have circulated previously and to which many people have some immunity.

2 . What should citizens expect from their local public health officials to help prepare for and respond to pandemic flu?

- People should expect frequent, truthful communication from their local public health officials.
 - Before a pandemic occurs, people should expect helpful personal and family preparation tips.
 - During an outbreak, people should expect status reports and vaccine/medication information.
- People should expect local public health officials to have realistic, comprehensive plans in place to coordinate a response with local emergency management teams including hospitals, and state public health officials.
- People should expect a fast response to the initial local cases to attempt to control a pandemic flu outbreak.

When antivirals and/or vaccine become available, citizens should expect adequate and organized dissemination of these materials.

3. What are some challenges of preparing for a flu pandemic?

- A major challenge involves preparing for a number of response scenarios depending on availability of vaccines and antivirals.
 - Vaccine for the new strain would not be available for 6-8 months after a pandemic begins, or possibly it won't be available at all.
 - People will need to understand that the priority groups who get any available flu vaccine or antivirals during an influenza pandemic may be different than the priority groups identified for flu shots during a typical flu season.

- We may need to rely heavily on changing people's behaviors to reduce illness and death.
- Schools may need to be closed and activities may be limited, such as shopping or large group activities.
- Some businesses may need to shut down.

4. How can average citizens protect themselves against pandemic flu?

- During a pandemic, people can control their own behavior:
 - Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer often.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, then wash your hands.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
 - Stay home from work or school and errands when you are sick.
 - Avoid close contact with those who are sick.

- During a pandemic, people will need to change what they normally do, in order to reduce the spread of the disease. If asked:
 - People may need to stop traveling.
 - They may have to stop attending sporting or entertainment events.
 - They may have to work from home, if possible.

- Families can create their own safety plan, prepare a first aid kit and stock emergency food and supplies.
- Right now, people can practice healthy behaviors:
 - Eat nutritious food.
 - Exercise.
 - Get enough sleep.
 - Get an annual flu shot at the right time to protect from flu strains that are circulating

**For more information on pandemic flu,
visit Three Rivers Public Health Department's website:**

www.threeriverspublichealth.org

or, the official U.S. government Web site for information on pandemic flu and avian influenza:

www.pandemicflu.gov

Reference: Texas Department of State Health Services. Pandemic Influenza FAQ, October 25, 2005.
http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/idcu/disease/influenza/pandemic/Pandemic_Influenza_Q_A.pdf