

What You Should Know About Avian Influenza (Bird Flu) and Pandemic Influenza (Worldwide Flu)

What is the bird flu (avian influenza)?

- Bird flu is a disease of wild and farm birds caused by influenza viruses.
- It is currently affecting mostly domesticated birds (e.g., farm-raised chickens, ducks and turkeys) in thirty (30) countries, worldwide.
- As of March 2006, the bird flu has **not** come to the United States.
- Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but since 1997 there have been a number of confirmed cases of human infection from bird flu viruses.

Will the bird flu cause the next influenza pandemic?

- The bird flu could cause an influenza pandemic among humans if the bird flu virus mutates (changes) so that it is able easily infect people (instead of just birds) and it is able to easily spread among the human population. Currently, the spread of bird flu viruses from an infected person to another person has been reported very rarely and has not been reported to continue beyond one person.
- Experts around the world are watching for changes in bird flu viruses that could lead to an influenza pandemic.

What is a flu pandemic?

- The flu (influenza) is a respiratory virus, causing cough, fever, and tiredness.
- A flu pandemic is an outbreak of a brand-new flu virus that occurs around the world.
- The new flu virus would come from the bird flu and would spread easily among humans.
- Pandemics are different from seasonal outbreaks of influenza because pandemic flu spreads more easily from person to person and can cause serious illness because people do not have immunity to the new virus.

How could a flu pandemic affect my life?

- During a flu pandemic, everyday life could be disrupted due to people in communities across the country becoming very ill at the same time.
- These disruptions could include everything from school and business closings, to interruption of basic services such as public transportation and health care.
- A flu pandemic could lead to high levels of illness, death, social disruption, and economic loss.

Is it safe to eat poultry?

- Yes, it is safe to eat poultry that is properly and thoroughly cooked.

Will the seasonal flu shot protect me against pandemic influenza?

- No, it won't protect against pandemic influenza.
- A vaccine for a pandemic flu virus will be different than the flu shot that people get every winter.
- Once a pandemic begins and the exact virus is identified, it will take from 6 – 8 months to develop, test, and begin producing a vaccine for the pandemic flu virus.

Has there ever been a flu pandemic in the past?

- Yes, in the past 100 years, there have been three influenza pandemics.
 - 1918-1919 Most severe, caused at least 500,000 U.S. deaths and up to 40 million deaths worldwide.
 - 1957-1958 Moderately severe, caused at least 70,000 U.S. deaths and 1-2 million deaths worldwide.
 - 1968-1969 Least severe, caused at least 34,000 U.S. deaths and 700,000 deaths worldwide.

What is the Three Rivers District Health Department doing to prepare for pandemic influenza?

- The Three Rivers District Health Department is preparing for pandemic influenza in Dodge, Saunders, and Washington counties by:
 - working closely with local healthcare providers, Nebraska Health and Human Services, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to monitor infectious disease activity at the local, state and the national levels. With these partnerships, we can immediately respond to potential disease outbreaks to eliminate or lessen their spread.

- providing the residents of Dodge, Saunders, and Washington counties with up-to-date information about public health issues that might affect us locally.
- keeping an inventory of supplies stored in a warehouse should we need to set up large-scale clinics to vaccinate all 75,000 of our Dodge, Saunders, and Washington county residents in a timely manner.

Each person must be aware of the possibility of a pandemic influenza reaching his or her community.

Stay Healthy

- It's very important for everyone to follow these simple steps to limit the spread of germs. Make these into a habit, if they aren't already. Doing this will reduce the spread of germs every day and during a pandemic.
- Stay at home if you are sick. Don't go to work, school or run errands when you're sick.
- Wash your hands many times during the day, with soap and water, for twenty seconds each time.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or into your upper sleeve (if you don't have a tissue) when you cough or sneeze. Don't cough or sneeze into your hand to because you will be spreading germs onto everything you touch.
- Put used tissues in the trash.
- Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing. Wash with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.

Be Prepared

- Stock a supply of water, food and emergency supplies at your home.
- Don't wait to prepare and stock food/supplies until a pandemic hits the U.S. or your state. During a pandemic you may not be able to get to a store. Or, stores could run out of supplies.
- Public waterworks services may also be interrupted.
- Store foods that:
 - are nonperishable (will keep for a long time) and don't require refrigeration.
 - are easy to prepare in case you are unable to cook.
 - require little or no water, so you can conserve water for drinking.

Social Disruption May Be Widespread

- A pandemic flu would cause many people to become ill, and making them unable to go to work.
- Plan for the possibility that usual services, such as those provided by hospitals and other health care facilities, banks, stores, restaurants, government offices, and post offices could be disrupted because many employees could be too sick to work.

Being Able to Work May Be Difficult or Impossible

- Find out if you can work from home.
- Ask your employer about how business will continue during a pandemic.
- Plan for the possible reduction or loss of income if you are unable to work or your place of employment is closed.

Schools May Be Closed for an Extended Period of Time

- Help schools plan for pandemic influenza.
- Talk to the school nurse or the health center.
- Talk to your teachers, administrators, and parent-teacher organizations.
- Plan home learning activities and exercises.
- Consider childcare needs.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, January 2006