

Pandemic Flu

An influenza pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of a new flu virus

An influenza — or flu — pandemic is an outbreak of a new type of flu virus that spreads rapidly from one country to another. Because the virus is new, people have no natural immunity to it and vaccine will not be available for many months. Without vaccine or immunity, the virus passes rapidly from person to person. Hundreds of thousands in our country could get sick, and many could die.

There have been three large flu pandemics in the 20th century – 1918, 1957 and 1968. No one knows where or when the next one will begin, but health officials agree that it is only a matter of time.

What to expect if an outbreak occurs

A flu pandemic could be devastating, so everyone should be prepared for the worst. With up to one-third of the workforce sick or staying home, supplies and services could be limited or disrupted.

Extraordinary measures could be required. You may be asked to stay away from other people, large public events like concerts or sports could be canceled, and schools could be closed. Health officials may issue orders to keep people with the virus at home or in special facilities. You may be asked to wear a mask in medical facilities or other public places.

A flu pandemic could last a long time. The 1918 flu pandemic lasted 18 months.

What to do now

- Know your neighbors. Encourage others to prepare.
- Be ready to help family and neighbors who are elderly or have special needs if services they depend on aren't available.

- Know school policies about illness and absence. Make a plan for taking care of your children if schools are closed for long periods.
- Be ready to stay home from work when sick. Know work policies about sick leave, absences, time off and telecommuting.
- Encourage planning. Every workplace should have a plan for doing essential tasks if large numbers of employees are absent over many months.
- Explore ways to get your work done with less personal contact, such as increased use of e-mail and phone conferences.
- Be prepared to get by for a week or more on what you have at home. Stores may not be open or may have limited supplies.
- Plan to limit the number of trips you take to shop or to run errands.

Prevent the spread of germs

The flu virus is spread from person to person when an infected person coughs, sneezes or touches things that others use. To protect yourself and others:

- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Cough into your sleeve or cover your mouth and nose with a tissue.
- Wash your hands. Soap and warm water are best, but alcohol-based hand gel or disposable wipes also work.
- Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Stay home when you're sick or have flu symptoms. Drink extra water, get plenty of rest and check with a health care provider as needed.

Learn home-care basics

- Know how to care for someone with fever, body aches and lung congestion. During a pandemic, follow health official's instructions.

- Learn about dehydration. The flu virus causes the body to lose water through fever and sweating. Watch for weakness, fainting, dry mouth, dark concentrated urine, low blood pressure or a fast pulse when lying or sitting down. These are signs of dehydration. To prevent dehydration, it is very important for a person with the flu to drink a lot of water — up to 12 glasses a day.



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