

ESP

FOCUS

Public Health Emergencies



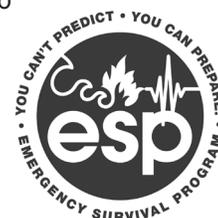
What Are Public Health Emergencies?

Public Health Emergencies may be related to outbreaks of infectious illnesses (such as pandemic flu and West Nile virus), food and waterborne illnesses (such as Salmonella, E. coli) as well as other threats to the public's health and safety. Man-made attacks can also create public health emergencies.

Pandemic Flu

A pandemic occurs when a disease spreads causing illness around the world—a global disease outbreak. While many diseases can become a pandemic, influenza (flu) is of special concern because it easily spreads and is constantly changing. And because flu occurs in many animals besides humans, this also increases the chances of it changing and becoming a pandemic. The 2009 H1N1 flu virus was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization, as the virus spread easily from person to person across more than 200 countries. The H1N1 flu marked the first global flu pandemic since 1968.

Fortunately, the H1N1 flu virus has been mostly mild to moderate thus far, and the vast majority of people who have contracted the virus have recovered without the need for medical attention. However, thousands of people, many with underlying conditions, have died from this virus. The threat of another flu pandemic remains, and everyone should be prepared. Plus, the simple steps that are recommended to prepare and prevent illness from pandemic flu will also help to prepare you for other emergencies and may prevent other illnesses.



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Pandemic, seasonal and bird flu: Do you know the differences?

Pandemic flu, seasonal flu, and bird flu: while many people think they mean the same thing, they are not the same. Do you know the differences?

	Pandemic Flu	Seasonal Flu	Bird Flu
What is it?	The flu virus is constantly changing, but sometimes it changes so much that the human population has no existing immunity. This new virus can cause much more illness and death than we normally have with seasonal flu.	Seasonal flu has the potential to cause illness every year and usually is worse in the winter months, but can start as early as October and continue to cause illness into the Spring. Because flu viruses are always changing, the flu shot changes almost every year to best protect people from the new strains that are expected.	Many different animals get the flu, including birds. Bird flu is flu among birds. On rare occasions, humans can also become infected from this virus when they have close contact with infected birds. Like human flu viruses, there are many types of bird flu viruses. The type that is causing concern now is called influenza A H5N1.
Who is likely to get it? Who is affected?	Everyone. Because we are waiting for a new virus to emerge, everyone (young and old, sick and healthy) are potentially at risk. Unfortunately, we will not know if some groups are more affected than others until the virus shows up and we can see its impact. Similarly, we will not have a vaccine (which is the best protection against seasonal flu) until scientists can study the new virus.	While everyone can get the flu, certain people are more likely to suffer severe consequences including: the elderly, infants, pregnant women, those with weakened immune systems, and those who have chronic illnesses—especially those with respiratory issues like asthma. So we urge those people, and their families, to get the flu shot every fall. However, everyone can benefit from vaccination and can help to reduce the spread of disease in our communities.	The people who get bird flu have had close contact with infected poultry (i.e., plucking and killing chickens sick with bird flu). Most of the people who have become sick and died from bird flu have been in Indonesia and Viet Nam, but sick birds have been found in many countries across Asia and some parts of Europe. This virus is NOT found in animals in the US. You cannot get bird flu from eating chicken or from other bird products (like feather pillows) in the U.S.

What to do if you get the flu?

The advice your grandmother gave is still the best. When sick; get plenty of rest, drink lots of fluids, and stay home to keep from getting others sick. Simple over-the-counter medicines are usually all people need to feel better (pain relievers, cough drops, etc.). Children should never be given aspirin when they have the flu since it may cause a rare but serious condition called Reye’s Syndrome. Remember antibiotics don’t work for flu viruses. Most people will not need to see a doctor when they have the flu, but if symptoms become very severe (problems breathing, and extreme weakness) and if fever lasts for more than 2-3 days, call your doctor.

Pandemic influenza readiness for you and your family: What can you do?

Many of the simple steps to prepare for a flu pandemic also impact things you should do for a wide range of other emergencies, these include:

1. Talk to your family members. It is important to think about the health issues that could affect you and your family during a pandemic or other emergency. Consider what you will need to care for you and your loved ones in your home.
2. Store food and water. During a pandemic, you and your family may not be able to get to a store, so it is important to have water and food items that won’t spoil (like canned foods) on hand.
3. Create a medical supply kit and a family emergency health information sheet. Include prescription medications, pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold remedies, and first aid materials. List the important medical information that you might need for all of your family, such as: serious health conditions, allergies, and medications that you and your family need.
4. Stay informed. The following are sites where you can learn more about flu and how to stay healthy.

www.flu.gov (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)
www.cdc.gov/flu (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

- www.ready.gov/america (U.S. Department of Homeland Security)
- www.prepare.org (Red Cross)
- <http://bepreparedcalifornia.ca.gov/EPO/> (California Department of Health Services)
- www.getimmunizedca.org (California Department of Health Services, Immunization Branch)

HEALTH TIP: Get the shot! Prevent the flu!

While pandemic flu is of great concern, seasonal flu causes a great deal of illnesses and death every year. The flu shot is the best way to keep from getting the flu. This year the shot is expected to be available in greater amounts than ever before! While the flu shot is especially important for those who are most likely to get very sick from flu (like the elderly and infants), anyone wishing to get the shot should do so. Even if you are not concerned about getting the flu, people rarely keep their illnesses to themselves—avoid spreading the flu to others. Get the shot and help to keep our communities healthy.

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