

## **Preparing You for Emergencies: Preparing for Avian Flu**

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. A flu pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which people have little or no immunity, and for which there is no vaccine. The disease spreads easily from person-to-person, can cause serious illness or lead to other complications, and can sweep across the country and around the world in a very short time.

It is difficult to predict when the next influenza pandemic will occur or how severe it will be. Wherever and whenever a pandemic starts, everyone around the world is at risk. Countries might, through measures such as border closures and travel restrictions, delay arrival of the virus, but past experience shows that it is almost impossible to stop.

Health professionals are concerned that the continued spread of an avian H5N1 virus found in domestic and wild birds across eastern Asia and other countries represents a significant threat to human health. The H5N1 virus has raised concerns about a potential human pandemic because:

- It is especially effective at causing disease
- It is being spread by migratory birds
- It can be transmitted from birds to mammals and in some limited circumstances to humans, and
- Like other influenza viruses, it continues to evolve.

Since 2003, a growing number of human H5N1 cases have been reported in Azerbaijan, Cambodia, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Thailand, Turkey, and Vietnam. Most of these cases are believed to have been caused by exposure to infected poultry. More than half of the people infected with the H5N1 virus have died. There has been no sustained human-to-human transmission of the disease, but scientists are concerned that H5N1 will evolve into a virus capable of human-to-human transmission. If that does occur, the world may be facing another pandemic like the Spanish Flu of 1918, the Asian flu of 1957 or the Hong Kong flu of 1968.

### **Should you prepare for Avian flu?**

Yes! Even if the Avian flu does not become a pandemic, preparations you make now will help you for other emergencies as well.

### **Avian flu hasn't hit the US, when should I start planning?**

Now! With modern rapid transportation, if Avian flu begins to have human-to-human transmission, the disease will spread worldwide in short order.

## What should I do?

As you plan, it is important to think about the challenges that you might face, particularly if a pandemic is severe. It may take time to find the answers to these challenges. A checklist and information guide has been developed by the government to assist you in planning and preparing.

You should store a supply of water and food. During a pandemic, if you cannot get to a store, or if stores are out of supplies, it will be important for you to have extra supplies on hand. This can be useful in other types of emergencies, such as power outages and other disasters. The table below gives you some suggestions:

| Examples of food and non-perishables                     | Examples of medical, health, and emergency supplies                                 |
|--|---|
| Ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits, vegetables, and soups | Prescribed medical supplies such as glucose and blood-pressure monitoring equipment |
| Protein or fruit bars                                    | Soap and water, or alcohol-based hand wash  |
| Dry cereal or granola                                    | Medicines for fever, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen                             |
| Peanut butter or nuts                                    | Thermometer   |
| Dried fruit  | Anti-diarrheal medication   |
| Crackers   | Vitamins  |
| Canned juices  | Fluids with electrolytes  |
| Bottled water  | Cleansing agent/soap  |
| Canned or jarred baby food and formula                   | Flashlight  |
| Pet food   | Batteries   |
|  | Portable radio  |
|  | Manual can opener   |
|  | Garbage bags  |
|  | Tissues, toilet paper, disposable diapers   |

Typically, people have been instructed in the past to prepare to take care of themselves without any support for 72 hours, but a pandemic may require you to distance yourself from other people for 4-6 weeks. Since there is currently no vaccine available, at this time the only way to protect yourself from getting the disease will be social distancing or isolation...staying away from other people.

You should plan on having sufficient food and supplies to prevent you from going to the stores. Stores may be in short supply of items from people trying to buy supplies, or they

may not have enough people to produce, deliver and stock food and supplies because employees are sick or afraid to come to work.

The most prudent action to take at this time is to take simple actions to prepare. When you are at the grocery, buy a few extra items that are non-perishable. Store these items in anticipation of an emergency. Rotate these items annually, use them or offer them to a food bank. Each time you get paid, take a little cash and put it in a secure location. You may need cash to buy things in an emergency and putting \$10 away every 2 weeks will help you have some cash in the event that people won't honor debit or credit cards.

Knowing the facts is the best preparation. Identify sources you can count on for reliable information. If a pandemic occurs, having information will be critical. Reliable, accurate, and timely information is available at [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov). Another source for information on pandemic influenza is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Hotline at: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636). This line is available in English and Spanish, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. TTY: 1-888-232-6348. Listen to local and national radio, watch news reports on television, and read your newspaper and other sources of printed and web-based information. Talk to your local health care providers and public health officials.

Links:

[Pandemic Flu Planning Checklist for Individuals and Families \[Personal Planning Checklist\]](#)

[Pandemic Influenza Planning: Guide for Individuals and Families](#)