



Ten Things You Need to Know about Pandemic Influenza

1 There is no pandemic flu at this time.

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. An influenza pandemic occurs when a new flu virus for which there is little or no immunity in the human population emerges and begins to spread easily from person to person. You can prepare by being informed and taking appropriate actions to decrease your risk of illness before the start of a pandemic.

2 The flu in the news recently is the highly pathogenic H5N1 avian (bird) flu virus.

The H5N1 virus primarily infects birds, but more than half the people who have contracted it from infected birds have died. There is no evidence of H5N1 in Ohio at this time, but because birds can also carry other diseases such as *Salmonella*, precautions are recommended. Avoid close contact with an infected bird's respiratory secretions, saliva or feces or any surface that has been contaminated with these substances.

3 Scientists are concerned the H5N1 virus may mutate to cause the next pandemic flu. History shows if this virus does not cause the next pandemic, another will.

So far, the spread of H5N1 virus from person to person has been limited. Nonetheless, because all influenza viruses have the ability to change, scientists are concerned the H5N1 virus may mutate to infect humans and spread easily from one person to another.

4 People can only "catch" bird flu from close contact with birds.

As of February 2007, H5N1 has not been detected in birds in Ohio. Should the H5N1 virus be found in Ohio, avoid contact with birds. If you do come into close contact, wash your hands and take steps to avoid carrying any bird excretions on your shoes or clothing.

5 A pandemic flu is different from seasonal flu.

Pandemic flu is different from seasonal flu because: symptoms may be more severe and complications more frequent; health systems may be overwhelmed; healthy people may be at increased risk for serious complications; occurs infrequently rather than every year.

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During a pandemic there will likely be disruptions to our daily lives.

When preparing for a possible emergency situation such as pandemic influenza, it's best to think first about the basics of survival, including fresh water, food and medical supplies. Because it may be necessary to protect yourself and others from spreading the flu virus, you may be asked to remain in your home for several days. Experts recommend you have at least a one-week supply of food, water and goods purchased over time to limit the financial impact and prevent store shortages.

Store a supply of drinking water; medical, first-aid and hygiene supplies; and other emergency supplies.

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Public health experts predict up to 40 percent of the population may be absent from work or school at any given time during a pandemic.

During a pandemic, stay home from work or school if you are sick. Heed warnings about social distancing. If "snow days" are put into effect to lessen spread of the flu, stay home. During these times, do not put yourself or others in danger by getting together.

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Keeping your body healthy can help fight seasonal or pandemic flu.

Although the currently circulating H5N1 virus has not achieved the ability to pass easily from human to human, health officials recommend people continue to take the same precautions they would to protect themselves from colds and seasonal flu. Make good respiratory etiquette a habit now.

Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues; wash hands frequently with warm water and soap or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer; do not touch your eyes nose or mouth, germs spread this way; stay home when you are sick; and stay away from sick people as much as you can.

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At the start of a pandemic, vaccine and medication to combat symptoms will be in short supply.

There currently is no commercially available vaccine to protect humans against the H5N1 virus. Vaccine can be developed only after a strain emerges; vaccine is different from antiviral medicines because vaccine prevents the virus from making people sick. Antiviral medicines treat a person's symptoms should they become sick. However, influenza viruses can become resistant to these drugs, so these medications may not always work. Additional studies are needed to determine the effectiveness of these medicines.

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Eating properly cooked poultry and poultry products is not a danger to humans.

There is no evidence properly cooked poultry or eggs can be a source of infection for bird viruses. Proper cooking of poultry products (at least 165° F) inactivates this virus as well as other food-borne agents.

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