



Pandemic Flu and You

Information to help you Prepare

Key Facts

What is pandemic influenza?



Pandemic influenza or pandemic flu is a worldwide outbreak of flu in people. Pandemic flu is caused by a new flu virus to which humans have no immunity. The flu virus that causes a pandemic can spread easily from person to person and may cause large numbers of people to get sick and die. Currently, there is no flu pandemic.

What is seasonal influenza?

Seasonal influenza (or the common flu) occurs every year. It can cause headaches, fever, sore throat, coughing and tiredness in people. Seasonal flu is spread from person to person via respiratory droplets. An infected person can spread the disease by sneezing and coughing which release droplets into the air. People can get sick either by breathing in those droplets or by touching their eyes, noses or mouths without washing their hands after touching surfaces or objects previously touched by an infected person. Each year, a vaccine is available to protect people from getting the common flu.

What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza or bird flu is a disease in birds. Bird flu is caused by viruses found naturally in birds. There are many different strains of bird flu viruses. Bird flu viruses rarely cause sickness in humans.

What is H5N1?

H5N1 is a deadly strain of bird flu virus that is causing ongoing outbreaks in poultry in many parts of the world. The H5N1 virus has infected over 200 people worldwide since 2003. Very limited person to person spread of the H5N1 virus has occurred. However, close contact with sick or dying birds is the main route of human infection. The H5N1 bird flu virus is not found in the United States at this time.

Can I get bird flu from eating chicken or turkey?

No. A person cannot catch bird flu by eating properly cooked chicken or turkey. Be sure to thoroughly wash your hands after handling raw poultry. Cooking utensils used to prepare raw poultry should be disinfected after use.

What should I do if I raise chickens and/or other birds?

To date, the H5N1 bird flu virus is not found in the U.S. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) along with state agencies are actively monitoring avian influenza activity in this country. All bird owners are encouraged to practice good bio-security, and to report sick birds or unexpected bird deaths as soon as possible.

1. Private Citizens can report sick or dead domestic birds (e.g., pet birds, domestic poultry) to a private veterinarian.
2. Report sick or dead ducks, geese or swans, multiple bird deaths, and/or unusual or unexplained bird incidents to Tuscaloosa County Health Department (205-554-4540).

Is pandemic influenza and avian influenza the same thing?

No, pandemic flu is not the same thing as bird flu. A pandemic describes a global outbreak of disease. A flu pandemic is a global outbreak of flu in people. Any new human flu virus can potentially cause a pandemic. Bird flu is primarily a disease in birds. On occasion, bird flu viruses have infected humans, as is the case with the H5N1 virus. But bird flu viruses cannot cause a human pandemic without first undergoing changes that allow them to easily infect humans and be spread easily from person to person.

Why should we be concerned about avian influenza?

The H5N1 bird flu virus can cause deadly disease in humans. It has infected 232 people (as of August 2006) since 2003. Over half of those infected have died. ([WHO Cumulative Number of Confirmed Human Cases of Avian Influenza](#)).

The H5N1 bird flu virus could *potentially change* into a human pandemic flu virus (one that easily infects humans and is spread easily from person to person).

How does a pandemic get started?

A human flu pandemic begins when a non-human flu virus, such as a bird flu virus, changes to be able to easily infect humans and spread easily from person to person. These changes have not occurred with the H5N1 bird flu virus. However, public health experts are concerned that with the continued spread of the H5N1 virus around the world, the virus could change into a form that can cause a human pandemic.

How likely is it that we will see a flu pandemic in our lifetime?

No one can predict when a pandemic will occur or how severe it will be. On average, a pandemic has occurred every 30 to 40 years over the last 400 years. There were three flu pandemics during the 1900's. The most deadly took place in 1918. Known as the Spanish Flu, the [1918 flu pandemic](#) killed 20 to 40 million people worldwide and millions more fell ill. 500,000 died in the US and 13,000 perished in Alabama. Two other flu



pandemics took place in 1957 and 1968.

What could happen during a flu pandemic?

- Public health experts estimate that in the US, 90 million people may become ill and over 200,000 people may die in a moderate flu pandemic scenario.
- In Alabama, a moderate flu pandemic may result in one million illnesses and around 2700 deaths.
- Outbreaks are expected to occur simultaneously throughout much of the US, limiting outside assistance that normally occurs with other natural disasters.
- As much as 40% of working adults may not be able to work due to illness, family member care, death, or fear of infection.
- Many businesses may close due to reduced staff, supply shortages and/or social distancing measures.
- A number of community containment measures may be implemented for disease control - schools and daycare centers may be closed, travel restrictions may be in place, and isolation and quarantines may be implemented.
- Hospitals and other health care facilities may be overwhelmed.
- Vaccines and certain medications may be in short supply.

How can we protect ourselves in the event of a flu pandemic?

Flu is spread from person to person through respiratory droplets. This can happen if droplets from the coughs or sneezes of a sick person travel through air and reach a nearby person's mouth or nose. Someone who touches respiratory droplets of a sick person (via handshakes or touching soiled objects and surfaces), and then touches his/her own mouth or nose without first washing their hands can also be infected.

Protect yourself and your family by doing the following:

- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth with dirty hands.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with shirt sleeve or tissue. Do not use your hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Exercise frequently.
- Get the yearly seasonal flu vaccine.
- If you are over 65, get the Pneumococcal vaccine in addition to the yearly flu vaccine.

What can we do now to prepare for a pandemic?

Prepare an emergency supplies kit for your family. The kit should include enough food and water for everyone (including pets) for at least 72 hours (3 days). A list of suggested food and emergency supplies can be found on this website.

Get the annual seasonal flu vaccine. Young children, older adults and people with pre-existing health conditions can suffer severe illness and even death from flu and its related complications. Flu shots are recommended for everyone over six months of age and are generally available by October of each year. A new form of flu vaccine, a nasal spray, is now available for healthy people between 5 and 49 years of age. Talk to your doctor about getting the flu vaccine. For more information about the flu vaccine and when and where to get vaccinated contact the Tuscaloosa County Health Department or [CDC's Key Facts about Influenza Vaccine](#)

Keep yourself informed. A list of websites containing information on pandemic flu and bird flu is provided under [Related Links](#). A downloadable and printable version titled Pandemic Flu Internet Resources can be found under [Information for Individuals and Families](#).

What about antiviral medications?

When taken appropriately, antiviral drugs (such as Tamiflu) may help reduce the symptoms and shorten the duration of flu. There are different types of antiviral drugs and they differ in terms of who can take them, how they are given, dosage based on age and medical condition, and side effects.

There is no guarantee that antiviral medications will be effective in treating pandemic flu. Indiscriminate use antiviral medications can cause flu viruses to develop resistance against these drugs. Also, several people in South East Asia who contracted bird flu died despite having been given Tamiflu early in their disease. For more information about antiviral medications, visit [CDC's Antiviral Drugs and Influenza](#).

Will vaccines be available?

There is currently no pandemic flu vaccine available. An effective pandemic flu vaccine is not expected to become available until months into a pandemic. This is because no one can predict what strain of virus will cause the next flu pandemic, making it nearly impossible to make a well-matched and effective vaccine in advance.

There are drug trials underway for human H5N1 vaccines. However, the H5N1 bird flu virus may or may not become the next human pandemic flu virus.

What are federal, state and local governments doing to prepare?

Federal

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services developed the [HHS Pandemic Influenza Plan](#) to guide national, state, and local policy makers and health departments in pandemic preparedness and response. [HHS Pandemic Planning Update II](#) provides the latest update on federal pandemic planning.

The President's pandemic plan primarily focuses on allocating funds for national stockpiles of vaccines and antiviral drugs and for the development of new vaccines.

Federal agencies such as CDC and USDA are actively monitoring this country for influenza activities.

State

Alabama State Public Health has developed a Pandemic Influenza Plan for the state.

Alabama is working with the federal government to monitor the state for bird flu and pandemic flu activity.

Tuscaloosa County

Tuscaloosa County Department of Public Health works closely with DCH Medical System, EMA and other agencies and organizations to plan and training for a pandemic as well as monitor for possible pandemic activity.

