

ALL ABOUT THE FLU

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Seasonal Flu

Human influenza (flu):

What is it?

- More severe than the common “cold”
- Periodic outbreaks are caused by flu viruses that circulate among people.

How is it spread?

- Person to person through coughing or sneezing.
- By touching surfaces contaminated with flu germs and then touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.

Dangers?

- Most people who develop significant illness recover within 7 to 10 days.
- Some people may take longer to recover.

Treatment?

- Most people recover without medication.
- Antiviral drugs (used for vulnerable individuals) must be started within 48 hours of onset of symptoms.

Vaccine?

- Seasonal flu vaccination is available through your healthcare provider.

Protect yourself?

- Get an annual flu vaccine.
- If appropriate, get the pneumococcal (“pneumonia”) vaccine.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough. (Use a tissue and throw it away when finished.)
- Wash your hands often, using soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with those who are sick.

Bird Flu

Bird flu, or avian influenza:

What is it?

- Viruses affect wild birds and typically do NOT infect humans.
- Current outbreak of bird flu that began in Southeast Asia is caused by avian influenza A (H5N1).
- Millions of birds have died and some humans have developed disease.

How is it spread?

- Migratory birds like ducks can carry the H5N1 flu virus and often do not have symptoms.
- Humans catch the disease through close contact with infected birds or their surroundings.
- In rare cases the disease has passed from person to person.

Dangers?

- About 50% of people infected with bird flu have developed serious illness and died.

Treatment?

- Antiviral drugs may improve the outcome or shorten the illness if taken early.
- Information on the usefulness of these drugs is very limited at this time.

Vaccine?

- No human vaccine is currently available for H5N1 bird flu.
- Several companies are developing and testing such a vaccine.

Protect yourself?

- Avoid contact with sick or dying birds in affected countries.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough. (Use a tissue and throw it away when finished.)
- Wash your hands often, using soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with those who are sick.

Pandemic Flu

Pandemics: A pandemic is an outbreak that occurs worldwide and affects many people.

What is it?

- Caused by new types of flu viruses (typically an animal virus such as bird flu).
- Can cause severe disease in humans.
- Transmitted from person to person.

How is it spread?

- Person to person through coughing or sneezing.
- By touching surfaces contaminated with flu germs and then touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.

Dangers?

- Experts predict as many as 25% of people worldwide could become ill.
- Experts think about 1-5% of those who develop disease would die.
- Predicting exactly who would be at the greatest risk is difficult.

Treatment?

- The effectiveness of antiviral drugs is not known at this time.

Vaccine?

- Annual flu vaccine will not protect against pandemic flu.
- A targeted vaccine can only be developed once a pandemic starts and the virus is identified.
- A targeted vaccine may take 4-6 months to produce.

Protect yourself?

- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough. (Use a tissue and throw it away when finished.)
- Wash your hands often, using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with those who are sick.
- Clean surfaces that are touched often such as phones, computer keyboards, water faucets, and door and refrigerator handles.
- If appropriate, get the pneumococcal (“pneumonia”) vaccine.