

PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

- Common flu spreads easily person-to-person and causes serious illness.
- Pandemic influenza is a global outbreak caused by a new strain of flu virus for which people have little or no immunity and for which there is no vaccine.
- In a pandemic, a disease sweeps across continents and around the world in a very short time. Border closures and travel restrictions may delay the spread, but not stop it.
- A severe influenza pandemic could lead to high levels of illness and many deaths.
- Experts predict a flu pandemic will occur, but it is difficult to forecast when.
- Pandemics can come and go in waves, each lasting six to eight weeks.
- A pandemic would affect daily life for a period of time and could include school and business closings, as well as disruptions in the economy and everyday functions.
- Medical professionals and facilities could be overwhelmed.



Flu Symptoms

- High fever
- Dry cough
- Runny nose
- Muscle aches
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Sore throat
- Nausea (which may lead to vomiting and diarrhea)

Transmission

Flu is spread through droplets expelled during coughing and sneezing. These can float in the air and be breathed into the mouth or nose of people nearby. The virus can also be spread when people touch respiratory droplets that settled on an object or another person and then touch their own or someone else's mouth or nose before washing their hands.

Who Is at Risk?

In a pandemic, everyone around the world is at risk, but especially—

- Children under 2
- Adults over 65
- Those who live in long-term care facilities or need regular medical attention
- Those prone to asthma or other respiratory conditions.

Because their responsibilities may bring them into contact with infected people, Coast Guard personnel in boarding teams, the Deployable Operations Group, and the health-care community would be at increased risk during pandemic influenza.

Vaccine and Treatment

Vaccines can generally be produced only after a new strain of virus appears, so the supply of antiviral drugs is likely to be inadequate early in a pandemic. Difficult decisions will need to be made regarding who gets antiviral drugs and vaccines.

Prevention

Flu viruses can be prevented by vaccines, antiviral medicines, and good hygiene:

- Update flu shots and other vaccinations to boost immunity.
- Get vaccinated every year because the vaccine is changed along with the mutating flu virus to help fight the most threatening strain.
- Frequently wash your hands with soap and water.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid contact with people who are ill.
- Teach your children flu prevention hygiene.

Preparation

- Get an emergency supply kit or update your existing kit(s).
- Increase water, food, and medical stocks to two-week supplies.
- Add hand wash with 60%–95% alcohol content, a thermometer, medicines for fever and diarrhea, fluids with electrolytes, and facemasks
- Make a family emergency plan, including a communication plan and care for extended family members.
- Communicate with superiors/supervisors regarding—
 - Evacuation
 - Continuity of operations
 - Leave policies
 - Possibility of working at home during a pandemic
- Be aware of emergency, containment, or evacuation plans and distribution sites.
- Contact local officials and check health and government websites to stay informed, and plan as you would for any emergency.
- Consider helping members of your community who might need assistance during an outbreak.

Emergency Response

- Be calm—stay informed and follow emergency plans.
- Practice infection control:
 - Good hygiene (especially washing hands)
 - Social distancing—
 - Limit direct contact by not shaking hands.
 - Telecommute or hold telephone or video conferences.
 - Maintain personal space of three feet or more.
- Limit exposure with sick people, and stay home if you are sick.
- Quarantine measures may be used to limit movement of people who may have been exposed to the disease, and isolation measures may be taken for those infected with the disease.

Where to Find Additional Information

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—www.pandemicflu.gov
- U.S. Department of State—www.travel.state.gov/index.html

Semper Paratus

Be “Always Ready.” Get an emergency supply kit good for at least three days, make an emergency plan with your family, and be informed about what might happen.