

Tip Sheets for Employees

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A comprehensive and confidential wellness, counseling, and referral program for employees and their household members

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Understanding the Impact of Pandemic Influenza

How Individuals and Families Can Prepare



In the event of pandemic influenza, individuals will play a key role in protecting the health and safety of their loved ones and themselves. Disease outbreaks are inevitable, and often unpredictable events. Outbreaks are frequently marked by uncertainty, confusion, and a sense of urgency. As state and federal governments plan for a possible avian flu pandemic, officials suggest that individuals and families should do the same.

What Is A Pandemic?

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. A influenza pandemic occurs when three conditions are met:

1. A new influenza virus emerges for which there is no current immunity.
2. The disease infects humans, causing serious illness.
3. The disease spreads easily from person to person.

What About Bird Flu?

Avian influenza, or bird flu, is a virus that naturally occurs in birds, especially wild waterfowl such as ducks and geese. Although bird flu meets the first two conditions of a pandemic - it is a new virus and it has infected more than 250 humans - there is no evidence that bird flu spreads easily among humans. Public health officials fear if the avian influenza virus mutates, it could more easily spread to humans. **Currently, avian influenza is not classified as a pandemic.**

How You And Your Family Can Prepare

The best ways to protect yourself and others is to stay informed, plan ahead, and practice healthy hygiene now and during a flu pandemic. As you plan, it is important to think about the challenges that you might face. It is important to realize that it takes time to find/develop answers to these challenges. Here are a few items to consider:

Services - Services on all levels may be disrupted

- Consider that hospitals, banks, government offices, etc. may not be available.
- Create back up plans if public gatherings, such as worship, are canceled.
- Plan for possible public transportation cancelations and/or fuel shortages.
- Consider how to care for those with special needs if services are unavailable.

Employment/Income - Being able to work may be difficult or impossible

- Ask your employer about their plans to operate in the event of a pandemic.
- Plan for income loss if you are unable to work or your company closes.
- Check with your employer or union about leave policies for yourself and family.

Children - Schools and/or Child Care may be closed for an extended period

- Talk with teachers/administrators about their plans to operate during a pandemic.
- Plan home learning and exercise activities for children who may stay home.
- Consider child care arrangements.

Staying Healthy - Medical facilities may be overwhelmed during a pandemic

- Take steps to limit the spread of germs: wash your hands, cover your mouth, etc.
- Stay at home if you are sick and avoid close contact with those who are sick.
- Don't forget healthy habits: eat well, exercise regularly, and get plenty of rest.
- If you are on medications or are receiving ongoing treatment, talk with your health care provider about access to medications and care during a pandemic.

Staying Informed - Staying Informed is the best preparation

- Identify sources you can rely on for accurate information.
- Look for information on your local and state websites.
- Talk to your local health care providers and public health officials.

If a pandemic occurs, having accurate and reliable information will be critical. Reliable, accurate, and timely information is available at **www.pademicflu.gov**. Another source for information on pandemic influenza is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Hotline at 1-800-CDC-INFO. This line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in English and Spanish.

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