

# Pandemic Flu

**Pandemic influenza is a global outbreak of disease from a new influenza A virus that is unlike past influenza viruses.**

**Because people have not been infected with a similar virus in the past, most or all people will not have any natural immunity (protection) to a new pandemic virus.**

## **How is a pandemic different from regular flu season?**

A flu pandemic has little or nothing in common with the annual flu season. A pandemic flu would be a new strain and a much more serious and contagious flu virus. Humans would have no natural resistance to a new strain of influenza. Also, there is a vaccine for *seasonal* flu, but there is no vaccine available at this time for a pandemic flu.

## **Why is pandemic influenza so serious?**

Because most or all people would not have immunity to a new pandemic virus, large numbers of persons around the world could be infected. If the pandemic virus causes severe disease, many people may develop serious illnesses.

Once a pandemic virus develops, it can spread rapidly, causing outbreaks around the world. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predicts that as many as 25% to 30% of the US population could be affected.

## **Can pandemic flu be prevented?**

Kalamazoo County public health officials are working with federal, state, and other local government agencies to respond to pandemic influenza and to maintain essential health care and community services if an outbreak should occur. In fact, governments all around the world are preparing for the possibility of a pandemic outbreak under the leadership of the World Health Organization.

It may not be possible to prevent or stop a pandemic once it begins. A person infected with influenza virus can be contagious for 24 hours before the onset of symptoms, and for seven days thereafter, making it extremely easy for the virus to spread rapidly to large numbers of people.

Anti-viral drugs can be used to treat severe cases as long as there is a reasonable chance that the drugs might help save lives. Although the federal government is stockpiling medical supplies and antiviral drugs, no country in the world has enough antiviral drugs to protect all their citizens. Antiviral drugs might also be prioritized for people who work in essential occupations, such as health care workers.

Other strategies for slowing the spread of a severe influenza outbreak could include temporarily closing schools, sports arenas, theaters, restaurants, taverns, and other public gathering places and facilities.

There is currently no vaccine to protect humans against a pandemic influenza virus because the pandemic virus has not yet fully developed. However, vaccine development efforts are under way to protect humans against a pandemic influenza virus that might develop from the current bird flu virus in Asia.

**Kalamazoo County Public Health  
Emergency Information Line:  
269-373-5300**

**Visit our website at [www.kalcounty.com](http://www.kalcounty.com)**

**When is pandemic influenza A expected?**

Influenza pandemics occur naturally. There were three pandemics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The pandemic of 1918-1919 was the most severe pandemic on record, in which 50 million or more persons around the world died, including approximately 650,000 Americans.

It is not possible to predict accurately when influenza pandemics will occur or how severe they will be. However, the current outbreak of avian influenza in Asia has influenza experts concerned that a pandemic is developing that may be severe.

**Why does the current bird flu outbreak in Southeast Asia pose a risk of causing a pandemic influenza A outbreak in humans?**

New human influenza viruses arise from bird influenza viruses that then change to a form that can infect humans and spread rapidly from person to person. The current bird flu outbreak in Asia is caused by a type of influenza A virus called "H5N1." The H5N1 outbreak among domestic chickens and ducks in Asia is widespread and uncontrolled. Human infections and deaths due to the avian H5N1 virus have occurred, although the virus has at this time not developed the ability to pass easily from person to person and cause outbreaks in humans.

**What can the public do to reduce their risk of pandemic influenza?**

- ◆ **Stay informed.** These websites provide regularly updated information about bird flu and pandemic flu:

**Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services:** [www.kalcounty.com](http://www.kalcounty.com)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):** [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

For more information on the vaccine development process, visit the **National Institutes of Health:** [www.niaid.nih.gov](http://www.niaid.nih.gov)

- ◆ **Stop germs from spreading.**

Cover your mouth and nose with tissue when coughing and sneezing

Wash your hands often

Stay home when you are sick

- ◆ **If you plan to travel to Southwest Asia, visit the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) for travel advisories.**

**Kalamazoo County  
Health & Community Services**

3299 Gull Road; PO Box 42

Nazareth, MI 49074-0042

Phone: 269-373-5200 Fax: 269-373-5363

Web: [www.kalcounty.com](http://www.kalcounty.com)