



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PANDEMIC FLU

WHAT IS PANDEMIC FLU?

Pandemic flu is an outbreak of flu that causes serious illness and spreads easily between people all over the world.

HOW DOES PANDEMIC FLU OCCUR?

- Flu viruses are always changing.
- Changes can occur whenever the virus reproduces.
- These changes are called *drift* and *shift*.
 - **Drift:** The most common changes are small changes that occur over time. These can cause seasonal flu.
 - **Shift:** Major changes sometimes occur. One way this can happen is when a new flu virus infects a person who also has a seasonal flu virus and the two viruses blend. The blended virus might create a new virus that could cause a pandemic.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

KY Cabinet for Health and Family Services
Frankfort, KY

<http://healthalerts.ky.gov>

KY Regional Poison Center Louisville, KY

EMERGENCY: 1-800-222-1222

<http://www.krpc.com/>

Lake Cumberland District Health Dept.
(606) 678 – 4761

The Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention (CDC) Atlanta, GA

Toll free: 1-800-311-3435

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/>

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov>

HOW IS SEASONAL FLU DIFFERENT FROM PANDEMIC FLU?

Seasonal Flu	Pandemic Flu
Follows predictable patterns	Does not follow predictable patterns
Usually occurs each winter	Occurs only a few times each century
Many people are immune	People are not usually immune
Predictable number of deaths	Many more deaths than seasonal flu
Deaths often caused by complications, such as pneumonia	Deaths often caused by organ failure and breathing problems
Symptoms include sudden onset, fever, cough, muscle pain, headache	Symptoms similar to seasonal flu, but more severe and with more complications
Health care providers can usually meet public and patient needs	Health care providers may be overwhelmed

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WHY DOESN'T THE ANNUAL FLU VACCINE PROTECT AGAINST PANDEMIC FLU?

- Seasonal flu vaccines protect against known human flu viruses.
- A pandemic flu vaccine cannot be produced until the new flu virus is identified.
- After the new flu virus is identified, it can take up to six months to develop a vaccine.

WHICH AGE GROUPS ARE MOST LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED DURING A FLU PANDEMIC?

It is likely that many age groups will be greatly affected. Factors to consider include:

- Few (if any) people will be immune to the virus.
- The virus could spread rapidly.
- A flu pandemic could temporarily interrupt vital community services.
- Activities that are important to public health and the economy may be disrupted.

HOW MANY PEOPLE COULD BE EXPECTED TO DIE FROM PANDEMIC FLU?

The death toll for the next pandemic cannot be predicted. We can plan based on history. Pandemics occurred three times in the past century.

- The most recent flu pandemic (1968) was relatively mild. About 34,000 people in the United States died. This is not much different than for an average seasonal flu year.

- The 1957-1958 pandemic was moderate. About 70,000 people in the United States died, and one to two million died worldwide.
- The most severe flu pandemic was in 1918-1919. About 500,000 people in the United States died, and up to 40 million people died worldwide.

HOW WOULD PANDEMIC FLU AFFECT COMMUNITIES AND BUSINESSES?

If a flu pandemic occurs, we may face the following challenges:

- Many people could become sick at the same time and would be unable to work.
- Many people would stay at home to care for sick family members.
- Schools and businesses could close to help prevent the spread of disease.
- Large group gatherings could be canceled.
- Public transportation could be scarce.

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WILL BIRD FLU CAUSE THE NEXT PANDEMIC?

An outbreak of bird flu will become a pandemic only if it spreads easily from person-to-person.

- Scientists do not know if bird flu will cause a pandemic.
- Public health officials are watching for outbreaks, working with other scientists, building stocks of antiviral medicines, and working to make a vaccine.
- This will help protect us no matter what kind of flu becomes a pandemic.

BIRD FLU AND PANDEMIC FLU ARE NOT THE SAME. RIGHT NOW, BIRD FLU IS A MAJOR PROBLEM FOR BIRDS ONLY. IT IS NOT EASILY PASSED FROM BIRDS-TO-PEOPLE OR PERSON-TO-PERSON.

WHAT STRATEGIES WILL HELP PROTECT US FROM A PANDEMIC?

In the event of a pandemic, certain measures may help contain or limit the spread of infection. Protective actions could include:

- Treating sick and exposed people with antiviral medicines
- Isolating sick people in hospitals, homes or other places
- Identifying and quarantining exposed people

- Closing schools and workplaces as needed
- Canceling public events
- Restricting travel

WHAT IS THE KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT FOR PUBLIC HEALTH (DPH) DOING TO GET READY FOR PANDEMIC FLU?

The Kentucky DPH and its federal partners are:

- maintaining a state of active awareness
- monitoring pandemic flu health issues
- educating the public about flu
- developing a plan that includes dispensing vaccines and other medical materials to Kentuckians in need

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WHAT CAN THE PUBLIC DO TO PROTECT THEMSELVES?

Practice good hygiene and health habits.

- Get seasonal flu shots.
- Wash hands often with soap and water.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or handkerchief, not into the hand.
- Stay away from people who are sick.
- Stay home if sick.

Do all that you can to improve your health now. Healthy bodies are more resistant to disease. Healthy actions include the following:

- Stop smoking if you currently smoke. If you don't smoke, don't start.
- Improve your eating habits.
- Exercise regularly.
- Get regular medical checkups.
- Keep vaccinations updated.

Listen to the news. Stay informed if there is an outbreak. Follow the instructions of public health authorities.

IF A PANDEMIC OCCURS, MORE SPECIFIC INFORMATION WILL BE AVAILABLE THROUGH THE EMERGENCY P HOTLINE AND IN THE MEDIA.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

HOTLINE: 1-800-222-1222