

Preparing for the Upcoming Flu Season

Flu is a serious contagious disease. Each year in the United States, on average, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 people die from seasonal flu complications.

This flu season could be worse. There is a new and very different flu virus spreading worldwide. Commonly referred to as “swine flu,” the novel H1N1 virus may cause more illness or more serious illness than usual.

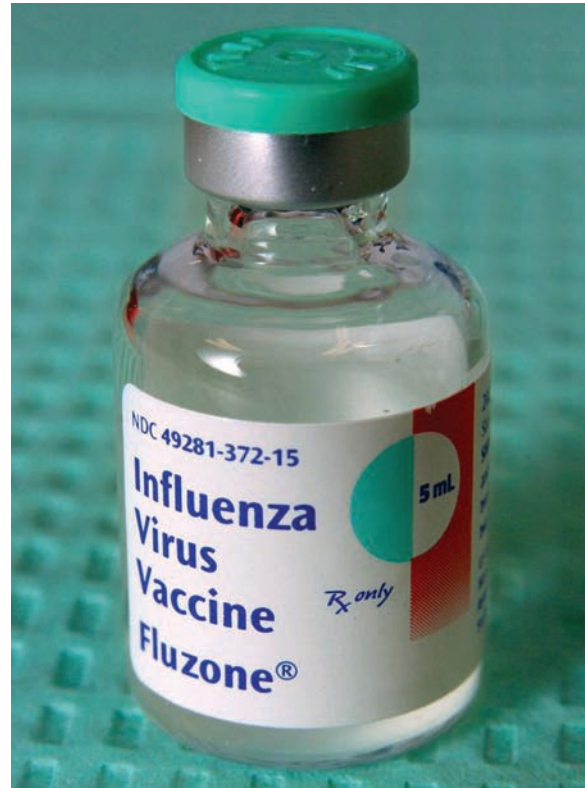
Flu Pandemic is Inevitable

The word “pandemic” is used to describe a disease that affects people on a worldwide scale. Flu pandemics have occurred roughly every 20 to 30 years throughout history. The U.S. suffered three pandemics in the last century, in 1918, 1957 and 1968. The most devastating was “The Spanish Flu” pandemic of 1918 which killed over 500,000 Americans and caused an estimated 40 million deaths worldwide.

Three conditions must be met to result in a pandemic:

1. The emergence of a new flu strain
2. The ability of that strain to infect humans and cause serious illness
3. The ability to spread easily among humans

Scientists at the World Health Organization declared that the current situation indicates an active pandemic; other researchers remain



cautious that a pandemic is looming. But, most experts agree that the question is not if another flu pandemic will occur, but when. So, whether a pandemic strikes in the next few months or the next 20 years, public health officials agree that we should prepare for this eventuality now.

The secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Kathleen Sebelius, put it this way: “Over the course of coming weeks and months, we will move aggressively to prepare the nation for the possibility of a more severe outbreak of the H1N1 virus. We ask the American people to become actively engaged with their own preparation and prevention. It’s a responsibility we all share.”

Preparedness Planning

When a pandemic hits, everyday life will be disrupted as many people in communities across the country suddenly fall ill at the same time. These disruptions could include widespread worker absenteeism, school and business closings, and interruptions of basic services such as public transportation, food delivery and health care.

The key to meeting these potential challenges is preparation—at every level, from cooperative global strategies and national policy to business continuity planning and individual action. Models of transmission of influenza show that an infection carried by just one person can be spread to tens or even hundreds of others. For this reason, individual action is critical to pandemic preparedness and response.

Spread of novel H1N1 virus is thought to occur in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something—such as a surface or an object—with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) urges people to take three steps to fight the flu:

- Get vaccinated
- Take everyday preventive actions
- Take antiviral drugs if recommended

Details of these steps are outlined in the attachment to this issue. These actions not only guard against seasonal flu—they can help protect against the new H1N1 virus, too.

Stay Up-to-Date

Several government websites offer planning checklists to help individuals, families, communities and workplaces prepare and respond should an influenza pandemic take place this flu season. Information at these sites is updated regularly to offer the most current and accurate information:

<http://www.flu.gov>
<http://www.osha.gov>
<http://www.cdc.gov>
<http://www.hhs.gov>
<http://www.who.int>

Flu-like Symptoms

People infected with seasonal and novel H1N1 flu shed virus and may be contagious from one day before getting sick to five to seven days after.

You can prevent getting infected by avoiding close contact with people who show influenza-like symptoms which include:

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Extreme tiredness
- Dry cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle aches
- Sore throat
- Vomiting
- Sometimes diarrhea

The most fundamental ways to limit the spread of germs and help lessen the impact of seasonal or pandemic flu are to wash your hands often and practice respiratory etiquette (cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, elbow or sleeve—not your hands).

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