

PANDEMIC FLU INFORMATION AND PREVENTION

Flu Terms

The US Centers for Disease Control differentiates among the types of flu:

- **Seasonal (or common) flu** is a respiratory illness that can be transmitted person to person. Most people have some immunity, and a vaccine is available.
- **Avian (or bird) flu** is caused by influenza viruses that occur naturally among wild birds. The H5N1 variant is deadly to domestic fowl and can be transmitted from birds to humans. There is no human immunity and no vaccine is available.
- **Pandemic flu** is virulent human flu that causes a global outbreak, or pandemic, of serious illness. Because there is little natural immunity, the disease can spread easily from person to person. Currently, there is no pandemic flu.

Avian Flu

Avian influenza - commonly called "bird flu" - is an infection caused by influenza viruses that occur naturally in birds. Wild birds can carry the viruses, but usually do not get sick from them. However, some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks, and turkeys, can become infected, often fatally.

One strain of avian influenza, the H5N1 virus, is endemic in much of Asia and has recently spread into Europe and Africa. Avian H5N1 infections have recently killed poultry and other birds in a number of countries.

According to CDC, the Avian H5N1 Flu in Humans is Currently Very Limited and Not a Pandemic.

- Human H5N1 influenza infection was first recognized in 1997 when this virus infected 18 people in Hong Kong, causing 6 deaths.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) is tracking the number of human cases of the H5N1 virus. The WHO website provides a map for showing the nations with confirmed human cases and the number of cases.
- Currently, close contact with infected poultry has been the primary source for human infection. Though rare, there have been isolated reports of human-to-human transmission of the virus.
- Genetic studies confirm that the influenza A virus H5N1 mutates rapidly. Should it adapt to allow easy human-to-human transmission, a pandemic could ensue — it has not done so to date.
- At this time, it is uncertain whether the currently circulating H5N1 virus will lead to a global disease outbreak in humans — a pandemic.

- The reported symptoms of avian influenza in humans have ranged from typical influenza-like symptoms (e.g. fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches) to eye infections (conjunctivitis), acute respiratory distress, viral pneumonia and other severe, life-threatening complications.

Pandemic Flu

Every year, usually between December and May, between 5% and 20% of the population in the U.S. become ill with seasonal flu. It can cause serious illness and even death in the very young, the elderly and other individuals with altered immune systems and chronic illnesses.

In 1918, 1957 and 1968 the U.S. faced especially severe seasons that lasted throughout the year, and resulted in a much higher number of illnesses and deaths.

- 1918 influenza pandemic caused at least 500,000 U.S. deaths and up to 40 million deaths worldwide
- 1957 influenza pandemic caused at least 70,000 U.S. deaths and 1-2 million deaths worldwide
- 1968 influenza pandemic caused about 34,000 U.S. deaths and 700,000 deaths worldwide

This more severe form is called pandemic flu. Public health experts believe that a flu pandemic is likely to occur again in the future. Therefore, it is prudent to learn about flu prevention as a general precautionary measure for all individuals.

Flu Prevention

General symptoms of flu include sudden onset of:

- fever (usually high)
- headache
- extreme tiredness
- dry cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle aches
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, also can occur but are more common in children than adults

How Flu Spreads

Flu viruses spread in respiratory droplets caused by coughing and sneezing. They usually spread from person to person, though sometimes people become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their

mouth or nose. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 days after becoming sick. That means that you can pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

Prevention

While avian flu is not a risk to you at this time, there are several things you can do to keep from getting the seasonal (common) flu.

- **Flu Vaccine.** According to CDC, the single best way to prevent the seasonal flu is to get vaccinated each fall. The "flu shot" – an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given with a needle. The flu shot is approved for use in people older than 6 months, including healthy people and people with chronic medical conditions. About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop that protect against influenza virus infection. Flu vaccines will not protect against influenza-like illnesses caused by other viruses.
- **Wash Your Hands.** Hand washing is effective in preventing the flu, cold and other infectious diseases. According to the U.S Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), rubbing your hands together with soap and water is one of the most important ways to prevent infection. Disease-causing germs can enter your body when your unwashed hands touch your nose, eyes, mouth, and open wounds. Make hand washing a habit and encourage others in your workplace to do the same.

When soap and water are not available, use an antibacterial hand cleaner or sanitizing wipes. Read the directions and use the product appropriately. When used properly, antibacterial cleaners and hand sanitizers significantly reduce the transmission of disease-causing germs.

Other good health habits instrumental in helping to prevent the Flu, these include:

- **Avoid close contact.** Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- **Stay home when you are sick.** If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- **Cover your mouth and nose.** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.