

Be Prepared! Stay Informed!

Pandemic Influenza (Flu)/Avian Flu

What is pandemic influenza (flu)?

Pandemic flu is a global outbreak of disease that occurs when a new influenza 'A' virus appears or emerges in the human population, causes serious illness, and then spreads easily from person-to-person worldwide.

Is pandemic flu different than the annual flu outbreaks (epidemics)?

Yes. Pandemic flu is different from seasonal outbreaks or "epidemics" of flu. Seasonal outbreaks are caused by subtypes of flu viruses that already circulate among people, whereas pandemic outbreaks are caused by new subtypes that have not circulated for a long time.

When is a flu pandemic expected?

Flu pandemics occur naturally. There were three pandemics in the 20th century. The 1918 flu pandemic led to high levels of illness, death, social disruption, and economic loss. It is not possible to predict accurately when flu pandemics will occur or how severe they will be. However, flu experts are concerned that a pandemic is developing that may be severe.

What is Avian influenza (bird flu)?

Bird flu is an infection caused by avian (bird) influenza (flu) viruses. These flu viruses occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide carry the virus in their intestines and can spread the disease to domesticated birds, like chickens, ducks, and turkeys. Although birds may not get sick if they are infected with the virus, they are still contagious.

The influenza A (H5N1) virus is also referred to as the "H5N1 virus." Media reports use the terms Avian influenza and H5N1 terms interchangeably.

Is it possible for the Avian flu to become a pandemic flu?

Yes, it is possible for the Avian flu virus to become a pandemic—a worldwide flu outbreak. The Avian H5N1 virus is a strain with pandemic potential, since it could ultimately adapt into a strain that is contagious among humans. Once this adaptation happens, it will no longer be a bird virus—it will become a human flu virus.

How does Avian (bird) flu spread?

Bird flu is spread by infected birds that shed flu virus in their saliva, nasal secretions, and feces. Susceptible birds become infected when they have contact with contaminated excretions or surfaces that are contaminated with excretions.

How do people become infected with the Avian flu virus?

The main route of human infection is through direct contact with infected poultry, or surfaces and objects contaminated by the poultry's feces. To date, most human cases have occurred in rural areas where many households keep small poultry flocks, which often roam freely, sometimes entering homes or sharing outdoor areas where children play.

What are the symptoms of Avian flu in humans?

The reported symptoms of avian flu in humans are similar to seasonal flu-like symptoms (e.g. fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches), but more severe. Symptoms can also include eye infections (conjunctivitis), pneumonia, acute respiratory distress, viral pneumonia, and other severe and life-threatening complications.

What should I do if I have these symptoms?

See your doctor immediately or seek medical treatment if you develop flu symptoms, including a



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fever, cough, and body aches, AND have recently traveled to a part of the world where bird flu has been reported (Southeast Asia and Europe). Be sure to let your doctor know when and where you were traveling and whether you visited any farms or open-air markets. Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) webpage for travel health information: www.cdc.gov/travel.

What is the risk to the U.S. from the Avian flu outbreak in Asia and Europe?

The current risk to Americans from the Avian flu outbreak in Asia is low. The strain of Avian flu found in Asia and Europe has not been detected in the U.S. and there have been no human cases of Avian flu in the U.S. It is possible that travelers returning from affected countries in Asia could be infected if they were exposed to the virus.

What can I do now to reduce the risk of illness?

By practicing good hygiene habits, you can help 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.
- Keep your hands away from your mouth and nose.

Do all you can to improve your health.

The healthier you are, the more resistant your body is to disease. It's a better time than ever to quit smoking, improve your eating habits, exercise regularly, and get regular medical checkups and recommended immunizations.

Is the Allegany County Health Department prepared to respond to Avian flu?

The Allegany County Health Department is working

with federal, state and other local government agencies to respond to Avian flu and maintain essential health care and community services for its citizens should a pandemic flu occur.

Since January 2005, the Allegany County Health Department, along with other members from the County Public Health Emergency Preparedness Workgroup, have been planning for pandemic flu. The Workgroup contains representatives from various community agencies such as the Western Maryland Health System, Allegany County Sheriff, Cumberland City Police, Cumberland Fire Department, Department of Social Services, Board of Education, Frostburg State University, Allegany College of Maryland, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Brandenburg Center, Finan Center, Maryland State Police, Allegany Department of Public Safety and Homeland Security, the Correctional Facilities (WCI and NBCI) and the Courts.

This workgroup meets once a month to address various aspects of pandemic flu and to keep the plan up-to-date.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR PANDEMIC FLU INFO:

Allegany County Health Department Website:
www.alleganyhealthdept.com (Click on the Blue Siren)

Department of Health and Human Services Pandemic Flu Website:
www.pandemicflu.gov

Centers for Disease Control Website:
www.cdc.gov

For more information, call the Public Health Preparedness Office at the Allegany County Health Department at (301) 759-5019 or (301) 759-5239



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