

What is “pandemic influenza”?

Pandemic influenza is a worldwide outbreak of a new influenza virus to which few people, if any, will have immunity. Having no immunity means that a person’s body has no protection against a disease. Because there is little immunity, the disease can spread easily and quickly from person to person.

What is the difference between influenza (flu) and pandemic influenza?

In the U.S., seasonal flu happens during the winter months. For most, it is unpleasant but not life-threatening. There is a vaccine available every year for seasonal flu. Pandemic influenza could happen at anytime of the year. It may last for a few weeks and then could come back several months later. Pandemic influenza can make people of any age sick. There is no vaccine for pandemic influenza.

Will a pandemic influenza occur? If so, when will it happen?

Many scientists believe another pandemic will occur but do not know when. The timing and severity of the next pandemic cannot be predicted. Influenza pandemics have occurred three times in the past century — in 1918-19, 1957-58, and 1968-69.

What age groups are most likely to be affected during an influenza pandemic?

It is likely that many age groups would be seriously affected. The greatest risk of hospitalization and death – as seen during the last two pandemics in 1957 and 1968 and during annual influenza – will be infants, the elderly, and those with underlying health conditions. However, in the 1918 pandemic, most deaths occurred in young adults. Few people, if any, would have immunity to the virus.

Will bird flu or avian flu cause the next pandemic?

Scientists cannot predict whether an avian influenza (H5N1) virus will cause a pandemic. Today, H5N1 is commonly called bird flu. However, as the virus changes, it is possible that it will become able to spread easily from person to person and then spread quickly around the world.

Is there a vaccine for pandemic influenza?

Currently, there is not a vaccine for pandemic influenza because we do not know what type of influenza will cause pandemic. Many national governments are working with researchers and scientists on a vaccine against the H5N1 strain of avian influenza, which has infected people and birds. Even if a vaccine for H5N1 is developed, it might not protect people from getting pandemic influenza.

Why is the state purchasing and storing influenza antiviral medication?

The state bought and will store a limited number of influenza antiviral medications to prepare for pandemic influenza. Storing the influenza antiviral medication now may prevent or reduce the possibility of shortages of the medications during an actual pandemic influenza. The state will have medication to cover about 25 percent of the population.

How can I protect my family from pandemic influenza?

The best way to protect yourself and others is to do the following:

- Wash your hands frequently with warm water and soap, scrubbing for at least 15 seconds.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing and use disposable tissues.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when hands are not visibly soiled.
- **Get the influenza vaccine every year.**
- People over the age of 65 and others with underlying illness should also receive the pneumococcal vaccine to lower their chances of getting a bacterial pneumonia and / or influenza.
- If you are ill, stay home and call your doctor.