

The role of government

If pandemic flu strikes, the government will be responsible for issuing information and warnings to the public, and for working with the media to disseminate advice on how to avoid becoming ill. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov) and the federal government's consolidated pandemic influenza Web site (www.pandemicflu.gov) are good sources of information about pandemic flu.

Your state and local public health departments also are excellent resources. Local government officials will communicate with the public about infection control policies in your community and provide other important information.



STEPS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY CAN TAKE NOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ Teach your children about the following common-sense precautions to prevent the spread of flu and model these behaviors yourself.
 - Avoid close contact with people who are sick. If you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too.
 - Stay home when you're sick or have flu symptoms. Get plenty of rest and check with your doctor.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve, not your hands. This may prevent those around you from getting sick.
 - Clean your hands. Washing your hands often will help protect you and others against germs. When soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based disposable hand rubs or gel sanitizers.
- ✓ Practice other good health habits.
 - Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious foods.
 - Avoid smoking, which may increase the risk of serious consequences if you do contract the flu.
- ✓ Discuss important health issues with your family and loved ones.
 - Ask them about how/where they would be cared for if they become ill and discuss what would be needed to care for them at home.
 - Think about who will care for children/people with special needs if all adults in the household are ill.
 - Are there other family members or neighbors who can fill in? Make those plans now and communicate them to all who need to know.

- ✓ Have generic medical and health supplies on hand. Examples include supplies like soap or alcohol-based hand wash; medicines for fever, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen; thermometer; fluids with electrolytes; and tissues.
- ✓ Anticipate shortages of common prescription drugs and plan accordingly. If you or a family member has a chronic disease and regularly takes prescription drugs, talk to your physician/pharmacist/insurance plan about having several weeks of medications stockpiled at home.
- ✓ Anticipate shortages in perishable foods, water, and common household emergency supplies. The federal government recommends stockpiling non-perishable food items, water, portable radios, batteries, flashlights, garbage bags, and manual can openers.
- ✓ Anticipate social disruption and make backup plans.
 - Schools may be closed for an extended period of time, so consider pooling child care resources with neighbors and learn if there will be community-designated child care facilities for children who are not ill.
 - Since being able to go to work may be difficult or impossible, talk to your employer about the possibility of telecommuting or working from home.
 - Transportation services may be disrupted, so consider carpooling options to go to work, schools, and supermarkets to reduce your reliance on public transportation.
 - Other public and community services may be disrupted. These could include services provided by hospitals and other health care facilities, banks, stores, restaurants, government offices, and post offices. Think about how you and your family might compensate if you are cut off from these services.
- ✓ Understand your company's sick leave and family and medical leave policies.
- ✓ To fight the annual flu, get a flu shot. Even those who are not in the high-risk categories should get a flu shot if enough vaccine is available. Those who have underlying medical conditions and everyone 65 or older should get a one-time pneumococcal vaccine.
- ✓ Do NOT go to work, school, or to any public place if you become ill!

A more comprehensive pandemic planning checklist for individuals and families has been developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and can be found at www.pandemicflu.gov.