

Emergency Preparedness Tips

Pandemic Flu

Officials recommend preparing for a pandemic flu in advance as daily services and supplies may be severely limited. It may cause a major impact on society, potentially causing an impact on the domestic and world economy.

What is a pandemic flu, and what's the difference from the ordinary flu?

- An influenza pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of a new strain of virus where people have little or no immunity. The contagious virus spreads easily from person to person, spreading rapidly among countries. In the last century there have been three worldwide outbreaks of a pandemic and many feel the world is on the brink of the next one. The Avian Flu, known as the bird flu, virus (H5N1) has spread to Asia, Africa and Europe in recent years. The virus is changing, affecting wild birds to poultry, possibly mutating to affect humans.
- The average flu season begins in the fall and winter. Fewer people get sick from the seasonal flu as anti-viral medications are available and flu shots afford some protection. Those who get the flu recover within a week or two and normally don't require medical attention. The seasonal flu normally affects the young, old and chronically ill.
- The pandemic influenza can occur anytime of the year. It may take many months to develop an effective vaccine against the new respiratory virus strain. Anti-virals will be in short supply as Public Health professionals believe as many as 25-30% of the US population may be affected by a widespread outbreak lasting for a long period of time. People of every age are at risk of serious illness and death.
- Similar to the ordinary flu, the virus spreads from tiny contaminated droplets through coughing, sneezing and talking. These droplets can contaminate surfaces of computers, door handles, sheets, food, toys, etc. The virus spreads when contaminated surfaces are touched and people then touch their eyes, nose or mouth.

What can you do?

- Stop the spread of germs. Get a seasonal flu shot and stay healthy. Keep vaccinations current.
- The World Health Organization has a system in place to track the emergence of a new pandemic. Nations are sharing information on disease outbreaks and collaborating on methods to control the spread of infection. The Centers for Disease Control, US Health and Human Services and the California and Alameda County Departments of Public Health are partners in pandemic planning efforts. When it appears that a pandemic will reach the US, government officials will issue warnings for the best course of action. During the pandemic governmental officials may impose travel restrictions or limit movement to prevent the spread of the flu virus. You may be asked to stay home for a period of time as schools and workplaces may be closed. Avoid large crowds at public gatherings such as worship services, sporting events or concerts. Mass transportation may be limited.

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Personal Preparedness

Lower your anxiety level by planning ahead for a pandemic or other major emergency. Oakland residents can take free CORE (Communities of Oakland Respond to Emergencies) emergency preparedness classes, sponsored by the Oakland Fire Department, Office of Emergency Services. Learn how to make a plan, build an emergency kit and get involved with your neighborhood and community. Call (510) 238-6351 or register online at www.oaklandcore.org.

Individuals who do not live in Oakland can contact their local CERT program (Community Emergency Response Team) to request similar training. Visit www.citizencorps.gov to do a search by zip code.

Practice Good Personal Hygiene

- Cover mouth and nose with tissue to cough or sneeze
- Cough or sneeze into elbow or upper arm, if tissues are not available
- Don't touch eyes, nose or mouth
- Wash hands frequently
- Avoid sharing objects as cups, utensils, towels, pens, telephones. Routinely disinfect surfaces. Avoid close contact with sick people. Stay home when sick.
- Wet your hands applying soap and use warm water if possible. Rub hands together for 20 seconds, pay attention to fingernails and surfaces where jewelry is worn, rinse well. Dry hands with a paper towel or hand dryer. Routinely use paper towel to turn off faucet and to turn door knob to exit door. Properly dispose of used paper towel well into the waste basket.
- As a temporary alternative, use alcohol based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) when soap and water aren't available. Apply sanitizer to palm of hand and rub hands together. Rub disinfectant over hands, nail areas and between fingers until hands are dry.

Emotional Strength

Learn how to cope with anxiety and difficult circumstances by Seeking accurate information. Learn about the pandemic flu. Plan to take positive steps. Focus on problem solving Recognize signs of stress Seek support from mental health provider, family and friends Find comfort in personal and spiritual beliefs

For additional information about preparing for a pandemic flu, please visit these sites:

www.pandemicflu.gov

www.hhs.gov/pandemicflu/palnsup5

www.ac.gov/publichealth/bioterrorism

www.cdc.gov

www.fda.gov/chrh/ppe/fluoutbreaks

www.who.int