

# Pandemic Flu Fact Sheet



## What is pandemic flu?

Pandemic flu is a global outbreak of disease from a new influenza virus that is unlike past influenza viruses. The current Avian "Bird" Flu falls into this category and could become a pandemic flu.

## How is a pandemic different from regular flu season?

A pandemic flu is a new influenza virus that could be much more serious than those seen in a typical flu season. Different from the usual strains of flu, humans would have no or little natural resistance to it. There is a vaccine for seasonal flu, but there is no vaccine available at this time for a pandemic flu and it could take at least six months after a pandemic flu appears to develop a vaccine.

## Why is pandemic influenza so serious?

Because most or all people would not have immunity to a pandemic virus, large numbers of persons around the world can be infected. Once a pandemic virus develops, it can spread rapidly around the world. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predicts that as much as 25% to 30% of the US population could be affected.

## What can I expect if pandemic flu hits?

Pierce County is working with other agencies to respond to pandemic influenza and to maintain essential government services if an outbreak occurs. However, it's not possible to prevent or stop a pandemic once it begins. A person infected with influenza virus can be contagious for 24 hours before the onset of symptoms, and for seven days thereafter, making it extremely easy for the virus to spread rapidly to large numbers of people. When a pandemic does occur, antiviral drugs will be prioritized for people who work in essential occupations, such as health care and public safety. Measures to slow the spread of a pandemic outbreak could include temporarily closing schools, sports arenas, theaters, restaurants, and other public gathering places and facilities. Basic services such as health care, law enforcement, fire, emergency response, communications, transportation, and utilities could be disrupted for many weeks.

## How can I prepare and protect myself?

- Stock enough food, water and other supplies for at least a week. Even if a pandemic does not strike, these are supplies that you need to prepare for all hazards in our region. Do it now! If you become ill, you won't be able to make a trip to the local grocery store.
- There is some speculation that flu vaccine may provide some type of protection, so it is recommended that those at risk get the regular seasonal flu shot.
- Wash hands regularly with soap and water. If not available, liquid sanitizers are good alternative.
- Practice good cough and sneeze etiquette. When coughing or sneezing, it is recommended to cover your mouth with a tissue or with your inner elbow if a tissue is not available (not your bare hands).
- Most importantly, you need to recognize flu symptoms and **STAY HOME**. Symptoms include fever (usually high), headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. If you develop an illness with these symptoms contact your health care provider or, if severe, call 9-1-1.
- Avoid contact with people known to have the flu or who appear to have a respiratory illness.

## How can I stay informed?

Monitor local media for updated information. Residents of Pierce County can tune into government programming on C-RCC, channel 22 in Tacoma and Pierce County and channel 86 on Click! Network. If a pandemic flu event occurs, up to the minute information will be posted on the Pierce County website at [www.piercecountywa.org](http://www.piercecountywa.org) -- look for the flashing red "Emergency Information" link.