

Answers To Common Questions About Pandemic Flu

As the 2005/06 seasonal flu season gets underway, there's been plenty of talk about pandemic and avian flu. The Iowa Department of Public Health and its partners would like to give you important information on what is the risk to Iowans and what you and your families can do to prepare.

Q.) What is influenza?

A.) Influenza is a virus that causes respiratory illness in humans and animals. The typical seasonal flu season in Iowa is December to April and is caused by the Type A and/or Type B strains. The first case is usually found in Iowa in early December, with the peak flu season occurring in mid-to-late January. Each year, the seasonal flu and pneumonia kill about 1,000 Iowans

Q.) How is influenza spread?

A.) Flu spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes into the air near another person, allowing the virus to travel from person-to-person.

Q.) Why do I need the flu vaccine every year?

A.) The flu virus changes each year, so vaccine supplies can't be held over from year to year. Since it takes several months to produce vaccine, health experts meet in February and predict which strains will be most likely the next flu season and make vaccine to cover those strains.

Q.) What is the pandemic flu?

A.) Pandemic is the way to describe a new and serious influenza virus that spreads across the world and is making people sick in greater numbers than expected than seasonal flu. The 1918 flu outbreak was considered a pandemic, as well as the 1957 Asian Flu and the 1968 Hong Kong Flu.

Q.) What is the public health community doing to protect us?

A.) Every year, public health monitors the different types of flu and how communities are being affected by checking with doctors' offices, schools, day cares, and long-term care facilities. Doctors also send specimens from flu patients to the University of Iowa Hygienic Lab to find out the specific type of flu that's in Iowa.

Q.) What is Avian or Bird Flu?

A.) Avian influenza is a strain of the flu seen in birds. The strain currently making birds sick in Asia and Eastern Europe, but doesn't spread easily to humans. The human cases in Asia have been in people that have been around and handled sick birds.

Q.) So why is there concern?

A.) There is concern in the health community this strain may change, or mutate, into a strain that easily spreads to humans and has the potential to cause severe illness worldwide.

How to Protect Yourself in Emergencies

- Develop a plan now on how you'll keep in touch with family members.
- Have a home emergency supply kit.
- Follow instructions from public health on how to keep yourself well and others from getting sick.
- Get the seasonal flu vaccine.
- Wash your hands often.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Stay home when ill.
- If you become ill after traveling or after being around sick animals, tell your doctor.

Web Sites for More Information

- www.idph.state.ia.us
- www.protectionowahealth.org
- www.cdc.gov
- www.pandemicflu.gov

❖ Flu Terms to Remember

- ❖ **Pandemic** – A serious disease outbreak that has spread around the world to many people.
- ❖ **Epidemic** – More people in an area becoming ill than expected.
- ❖ **Avian** – A flu that infects birds.
- ❖ **Seasonal Flu** – Occurs every year, usually in winter months here in the U.S..



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