



# K A N S A S

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## Pandemic Flu Q&A

### **What is 'pandemic' flu?**

A "pandemic" is a worldwide epidemic, or outbreak of a disease, usually one that is new or has not been seen in a long time. "Pandemic flu" is very different from the "regular," or seasonal flu.

Pandemic flu involves a new strain of the influenza virus where there is no resistance or very little resistance. Flu pandemics can last much longer than a regular flu season, usually spanning many more months. Pandemic flu episodes have been noted for at least the last 300 years of history.

### **Is there a vaccine to prevent pandemic flu?**

Because the exact characteristics of a pandemic flu virus are not yet known, a specific vaccine for it would have to be developed after the virus emerges. It is generally believed that it would take six months or more to produce a vaccine for a pandemic flu virus after it is identified in humans. Because a pandemic flu would be a virus that people have no immunity against, two vaccinations against the pandemic strain of flu would probably be needed.

An experimental vaccine for one of the potential influenza viruses that could cause a pandemic, H5N1 virus, is being tested and might provide limited immunity, although this is uncertain.

### **What are some ways to prevent the spread of pandemic flu?**

Just because a virus can be spread around the world does not mean it cannot be stopped. A pandemic flu virus would cause more serious illness than a seasonal flu virus, but it would still be just that – an influenza virus. There are some simple actions that people can take to limit the spread of almost any virus, including pandemic flu.

Flu viruses are often spread when we cough or sneeze into our hands, and then shake hands with someone else. That person then touches their mouth or nose, or uses their hands to eat, eventually transferring the virus that is now on their hands into their throat and lungs. Viruses that get into the air when a sick person coughs or sneezes can also spread the virus.

Frequently washing hands with soap and warm, running water for at least 20 seconds will effectively remove flu viruses from our hands so that we do not pass it on to others. In order for handwashing to be most effective, all hand surfaces must be thoroughly washed, including both sides of the hands, between the fingers, and the nails and fingertips. Also, avoiding touching our own nose and mouth will help keep viruses that may be on our hands away from our throat and lungs.

Covering our cough or sneeze with the crook of our elbow instead of our hands will also ensure that the virus is not on our hands when we come into contact with other people. It will also stop a large portion of the virus from being released into the air that other people are breathing. Covering our cough is just plain “good manners.”

Staying home from work or school when sick with a high fever that might be the flu is another good way to stop spreading viruses to others. We might be concerned about what people will think if we call in sick, but if there is a chance that we could prevent spreading a pandemic flu virus, staying home is absolutely essential.

### **What is being done about the threat of pandemic flu?**

The Kansas Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and Response Plan has been newly developed with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO). The state plan provides guidance for local health departments.

The plan would direct the investigation and management of pandemic flu cases, and provide guidance to agencies on how to communicate with the public and with each other. The plan will be exercised at least once every year.

The plan would also call upon Kansans to help fight pandemic flu by taking specific actions, if it strikes. These actions include the preventive measures described above. They also could include such things as following a health department quarantine request (voluntary quarantine) if health professionals determine you may have been exposed to a pandemic flu virus (even if you are not sick or do not feel sick), to prevent possible spread of the virus to others. Kansans would also be asked to stay tuned to the media for new information as it develops, because there are many things about pandemic flu that will not be known until it does occur.

### **What is ‘avian’ flu, and what does it have to do with ‘pandemic’ flu?**

Avian, or bird, flu is a virus that is spread among birds. There is concern that a strain of avian flu virus found in parts of Southeast Asia and Europe known as H5N1 could mutate to spread easily among people, causing the next flu pandemic.

Avian flu is spreading widely among birds in parts of Southeast Asia and Europe, and has been on rare occasions passed from birds to humans, resulting in severe illness that often leads to death for those who catch the disease.

National and international health agencies like CDC, WHO and the International Veterinary Health Organization (OIE) are actively monitoring the H5N1 virus.

### **Where can I learn more about pandemic flu?**

For more information about avian flu and pandemic flu, visit the CDC Web site at [www.cdc.gov/flu/avian](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian), the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) Web site at [www.kdheks.gov](http://www.kdheks.gov), or call CDC’s toll-free hotline at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).