# TEN PANDEMIC FLU

# SELF CARE

# FACT SHEETS

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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# Ten Pandemic Flu Self Care Fact Sheets

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## Pandemic Flu

# Planning for a Pandemic

If there is a flu pandemic, many people will be sick and it may be difficult to get medical care. For this reason, it is important to be prepared to take care of yourself and others at home as much as possible. Because you may need to be home during the pandemic, it is a good idea to stock up on basic supplies, such as food and water. Have a supply of your regular medications and a list of phone numbers of family, friends, neighbors, and your doctor.

There are antiviral drugs that can be prescribed by a doctor to treat the flu. During a pandemic, however, antiviral drugs may be in short supply, only available for those most likely to get very sick or die from the flu, or for those who work in essential services such as health care, fire and police work.

Home treatment and self care can relieve many symptoms and reduce the risk for further problems. If you get the flu, make arrangements for someone to help you if you become ill. This is especially important if you are alone, are a single parent or are responsible for the care of someone who is frail or disabled. Plan to stay home if you are sick. This will ensure that you get the rest you need and that you don't spread the virus to others.

**Prepare to have the things you need if you get sick. You will need to:**

- ♦ **Drink lots of fluids.** This includes water, real juice, milk and herbal teas. It is best to have drinks without caffeine, because caffeine actually makes you lose fluid from your body.
- ♦ **Take basic pain/fever relievers.** Examples are acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen. Acetylsalicylic acid (Aspirin®) should NOT be given to children or teenagers.
- ♦ **Use a hot water bottle or heating pad.** Applying heat carefully, for short periods of time, can help reduce muscle pain. Check the skin often when using a heating pad because the pad can cause burns and blisters.
- ♦ **Take cough medicine.** This helps especially if you have a dry cough.
- ♦ **Get lots of rest.**
- ♦ **Take a warm bath with Epsom salts.**
- ♦ **Gargle with a glass of warm water and/or suck on sugarless hard candy or lozenges.** They can ease your sore throat.
- ♦ **Use saline drops or spray or decongestants.** These help soothe or clear a stuffed nose.
- ♦ **Avoid alcohol and tobacco.** Smoking especially irritates damaged airways.
- ♦ **Avoid sharing anything that may carry germs** such as towels, lipstick, cigarettes, drinks, or toys.
- ♦ **Wash your hands often.** Use soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds each time, or alcohol-based hand cleaners if your hands do not look dirty. This will help you avoid spreading the flu to others.
- ♦ **Take over-the-counter medicine to ease symptoms.** Let the pharmacist know if you have any chronic medical problems and advise you about choices.

For seasonal flu, most healthy people feel better in five to seven days. However, general tiredness and cough can last longer, up to two to three weeks. For pandemic flu, it is not known if it will take longer to get better.

# Pandemic Influenza FAQ

## Frequently Asked Questions

**What is influenza?**

Influenza or the "flu" is a highly contagious viral infection of the respiratory tract. It is not what some people call 'stomach flu' that causes abdominal upset and diarrhea. There are different types of influenza virus, A and B and C. Only type A causes pandemics in humans.

**What is pandemic influenza?**

Pandemic influenza is a global outbreak of severe influenza affecting many people in many countries. Unlike the usual influenza virus that infects people each winter, pandemic influenza may strike at anytime of the year, causing much more sickness and death than seasonal influenza. Many scientists believe that it is only a matter of time until the next influenza pandemic occurs.

**What causes pandemic influenza?**

Pandemics are caused by subtypes of the influenza A virus. It may be a new subtype or a subtype that has not circulated among humans for a long time. Certain things need to take place for a pandemic to occur. The subtype has to be able to cause serious illness in humans who have little or no immunity to that specific subtype and it has to be easily transmitted from person to person.

**How is influenza spread?**

It is spread from person to person in respiratory droplets by coughs and sneezes. It can also be spread when people touch respiratory droplets of another person or an object and then touch their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands. The virus may enter through the eyes, or more commonly through the nose or mouth and into the throat and lungs where it begins to multiply. After a person is first exposed to the flu virus, symptoms begin in one to three days.

**How long is the influenza virus infectious/contagious?**

A person with the flu is contagious 24 hours before he or she becomes sick and for five days after becoming sick. Some children may be contagious for longer than a week. The virus can live for up to two days on hard surfaces such as doorknobs, handrails, toys, cups, utensils, telephones. It can live on the hands for up to five minutes.

**How do I know if I have influenza?**

You may have the flu if you have a sudden onset of a respiratory illness with a cough, fever, headache, muscle pain, a runny nose, sore throat, and body aches. Children with influenza can have nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. Adults over 65 and children under five may not have a fever when sick with the flu. Although colds and other viruses may cause similar symptoms, influenza weakens a person much more. Most healthy people will feel better in five to seven days but symptoms may last for two to three weeks. Complications of influenza, such as pneumonia, can be more severe for the elderly, infants or people with chronic health problems.

## Pandemic Influenza FAQ/2

**What can I do to protect my family and myself?**
You can protect yourself from getting the flu by washing your hands frequently and avoiding close contact with people who have the flu. Healthy eating, adequate sleep and physical activity are essential to your well-being. Practicing good personal hygiene will also help to protect you from getting and spreading the flu. Use disposable, single-use tissues for wiping your nose; cover your nose and mouth when sneezing and coughing; hand wash after coughing, sneezing or using tissues; and keep hands away from the eyes, nose and mouth.

It is recommended that people at high risk for getting influenza and its complications and their caregivers receive an annual influenza vaccine. These groups include: people 65 and older; children 6-23 months of age; people in nursing homes, long-term care facilities and other institutions; people with chronic medical conditions such as heart or lung disease, diabetes or those with a weakened immune system; health care workers, essential service workers and healthy people living in the same house as high risk people who either cannot be vaccinated or may respond inadequately to vaccination.

**Will there be a vaccine against the pandemic influenza?**
Research and development of new influenza vaccines is ongoing. Development of new vaccines and testing them for effectiveness and safety takes time. Once the pandemic influenza strain is identified, the first lots of pandemic influenza vaccines are expected to be available in six to nine months. Therefore, vaccine may not be available during the first "wave" of the pandemic. When vaccines first become available, they may be in short supply.

**Will there be medications to prevent or cure pandemic influenza?**
Two different influenza antiviral medications (amantadine and oseltamivir) can be used for the treatment and/or prevention of influenza. Both work against influenza A viruses. It is important that antiviral medications are used in the correct manner, because incorrect use may lead to drug resistance. Antiviral medications are also expected to be in short supply during a pandemic. Therefore, like vaccines, they will be given first to the high-risk groups.

## Pandemic Flu

# Staying Healthy

**Washing hands is one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of the influenza.**

**Stay healthy at home**

- ♦ Eat, rest well and exercise
- ♦ Wash your hands frequently with warm water and soap
- ♦ Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing
- ♦ Limit visitors to your home
- ♦ Check up on friends and family who live alone
- ♦ Watch for regular influenza updates from your Public Health Department
- ♦ Get the influenza vaccine when available
- ♦ It is recommended that people at high risk of getting influenza and its complications and their caregivers receive an annual influenza vaccine

**Stay healthy at work**

- ♦ Work from home or arrange to work flex hours if possible
- ♦ Wash your hands frequently with warm water and soap
- ♦ Use waterless sanitizing gel to clean hands if soap & water are not available
- ♦ Clean objects and hard surfaces that are handled by many people with a disinfectant
- ♦ Keep your office door closed
- ♦ Use stairs instead of crowded elevators
- ♦ Cancel non-essential meetings: use teleconferencing/video conferencing/emails/fax

**Stay healthy away from crowds**

- ♦ Stock up on basic items
- ♦ Shop at smaller stores with smaller lines
- ♦ Shop at off peak hours and find out which stores stay open late or 24 hours
- ♦ Arrange to pay bills at ATMs, online or over the phone
- ♦ Cancel or postpone family gatherings, outings or trips.
- ♦ Avoid unnecessary travel, crowded restaurants and public transport
- ♦ Stay three feet away from people who are coughing or sneezing

**If you cannot avoid crowds, minimize the amount of time you spend around people.**
**If you feel unwell, stay home, rest and drink plenty of fluids.**

**Pandemic Flu**

# Personal Protective Hygiene

There are several things you can do to reduce your chances of getting sick with the flu, and to avoid passing it to others if you are infected.

♦ **Maintain good routine health practices, including** eating well, getting enough sleep and exercising regularly.

♦ **Get a flu shot each year.** It is the best way to protect you from getting sick from the flu each year. If you are over 65 years of age, ask your doctor for a shot to protect you against pneumococcal infection, as well.

♦ **Wash your hands often** and for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water, and always after you cough or sneeze. An alcohol-based hand cleaner also works if your hands do not look dirty. This is one of the best ways to protect you from the flu.

♦ **Practice good cough manners.** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or cough into your upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue. Throw the used tissue into the garbage right away and wash your hands.

♦ **Stay home if you are sick** to make sure that you get the rest you need and that you don't spread your germs to others.

♦ **Stay away from people who are sick.** Try to stay at least three feet away from people who are sick with the flu.

♦ **Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth.** This is a common way to spread germs.

♦ **Avoid public gatherings and crowds.**

♦ **Call your doctor before visiting the office** while you are sick and are able to spread the illness to others. Your doctor's office will also be able to tell you if there are special clinics for people with the flu or flu-like symptoms, and where those clinics are.

These things are even more important during a flu pandemic, both to protect you and your family from getting sick, and because it may be hard to get medical when many people may be sick at the same time.

## Pandemic Flu

# Home Protective Hygiene

**Protective hygiene**
Most patients with pandemic influenza will be able to remain at home during the course of their illness and can be cared for by other family members. Anyone residing in a household with an influenza patient during the incubation period and illness is at risk for developing influenza. A key objective in this setting is to limit transmission of pandemic influenza within and outside the home.

Good personal hygiene will help protect you and your family from coming in contact with influenza viruses. Vaccines and antiviral medications will not be available to the general public in the early phases of the pandemic. Strict adherence to personal, home hygiene may be the only preventative measure available. Wash your hands frequently, especially when you are near sick people. Use disposable, single-use tissues for wiping noses; cover nose and mouth when sneezing and coughing; hand wash after coughing, sneezing or using tissues; keep hands away from the eyes, nose and mouth. Healthy eating, adequate sleep and physical activity are essential to your health. By **frequently washing your hands** you wash away germs, viruses and bacteria that you have picked up from other people, or from contaminated surfaces, or from animals and animal waste.

**Wash your hands often**

- Before, during and after you prepare food
- Before you eat
- After using the bathroom
- After sneezing or coughing or blowing your nose
- When your hands are dirty
- More frequently when someone in your home is sick
- After touching commonly used items

**Use alcohol-based hand wipes and gel sanitizers**
When soap and water are not available, alcohol based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores.

**Home protective hygiene**
Influenza virus can live up to two days on hard surfaces. Wash hard surfaces (sinks, counters, etc.) with a disinfectant such as a ten percent bleach solution (one part bleach and nine parts water) to kill the influenza virus. Surfaces that are frequently touched with hands should be cleaned often. Careful, thorough cleaning of surfaces is effective in removing the influenza virus and many other germs.

If a member of your family is ill with influenza, keep personal items, such as towels, separate from the rest of the family. Do not share towels. Do not share eating utensils or drinks with anyone (you never know who is sick or who is not sick). Ensure that your home always has adequate supplies for hand washing and cleaning. Special handling of laundry or linen from a person who may have influenza is not necessary. Wash clothing and linen in a warm wash cycle with a commercial laundry detergent and dry as usual. The garbage generated by a person with influenza does not require special handling.

## Pandemic Flu

# More Tips for Families

**At home**

♦ Check up on family, friends and neighbors who live alone.
♦ Offer to get groceries and run errands for family/friends/neighbors who are at higher risk for getting influenza (elders, persons with other chronic medical conditions).
♦ Anticipate what you will need during a pandemic and stock up on foodstuffs, cleaning supplies, prescription medication and basic medications such as Acetaminophen (i.e. TylenolTM ).
♦ Keep in mind that the pandemic may last several months and come in waves.
♦ Keep emergency phone numbers and self-care instructions in a place where everyone in the family can access them.
♦ Because schools and community centers may be closed, keep books and games at home for your children to play with.
♦ Arrange for childcare that minimizes exposing your children to crowds.
♦ Make arrangements with your child's teacher for schoolwork to be done from home.
♦ Pets – If there is bird flu in your area, keep your cats in the house. Cats have caught the flu virus from dead birds. Pigs, birds/poultry and horses are at risk for getting influenza. If you have these animals as pets or live on a farm you should take extra special care washing your hands after contact with them.

**At work or school**

♦ Stay at home if you are ill.
♦ Drive your car, walk or ride your bike, rather than using public transportation buses.
♦ Go early or late to avoid rush hour crowding on public transit.
♦ Minimize contact with others.
♦ If you need to meet with people, stay three feet away.
♦ Avoid shaking hands, hugging or kissing people as greetings.
♦ Work from home if possible.
♦ Work flex hours (come in early or late to avoid working in close spaces with others).
♦ Cancel or postpone travel and face-to-face meetings where possible.
♦ Have meetings using video or teleconferencing.
♦ Make use of emails to pass on information.
♦ Bring your lunch and eat at your desk or away from others. Avoid the cafeteria and crowded restaurants.
♦ Sit at the back of the class, away from others.
♦ Walk up and down stairs instead of using crowded elevators.

**Shopping**

♦ Go to stores at off hours to avoid crowds.
♦ Shop at smaller stores which have few other customers.
♦ Find out which stores are open 24 hours in your neighborhood.
♦ Find out which stores and pharmacies take telephone orders or deliver to your home.

## Pandemic Flu

# Social Distancing

You can protect yourself and minimize being exposed to influenza viruses by avoiding crowds of people. People can look healthy but still spread the virus. Influenza is infectious for 24 hours before symptoms develop. The more people you are in contact with, the more you are at risk for coming in contact with someone who has influenza. The more time you spend in contact with people, the greater the chance you will be exposed to someone who is carrying the influenza virus.

Social distancing refers to methods to reduce the frequency and closeness of contact between people to reduce the risk of infection. Social distancing methods include staying at least three feet from people who are coughing or sneezing, avoiding face-to-face meetings, avoiding unnecessary travel, public transportation, restaurants, malls and gatherings.

The risk of spreading the influenza virus in day care settings and schools is high because of the large number of people and the amount of time spent together in a confined area. The risk of infection is influenced by the age of the child, group size, the nature of the activity and the hygiene habits of the child. Influenza acquired in these settings is easily spread to attendants, teachers, family members and the community.

**Stay away from crowds.** Cancel or postpone family gatherings, outings or trips. Keep your home stocked up on basic items. Shop at smaller stores with smaller checkout lines during off peak hours, and find out which stores stay open late/24 hours. If possible, phone ahead your grocery order for quick pick up, or delivery, if possible. Arrange to pay bills at ATMs, online or over the phone.

**If you cannot avoid crowds, minimize the amount of time you spend around people.** Work from home or arrange to work flex hours if possible. Keep your office door closed. Use stairs instead of crowded elevators. Cancel non-essential meetings: use teleconferencing/video conferencing, emails and fax.

## Pandemic Flu
# Office Protective Hygiene

Vaccines and antiviral medications will not be available to the general public in the early phases of the pandemic. Strict adherence to personal, home and office hygiene may be the only preventative measure available. Wash your hands frequently, especially when you are near sick people. Use disposable, single-use tissues for wiping noses; cover nose and mouth when sneezing and coughing; hand wash after coughing, sneezing or using tissues; keep hands away from the eyes, nose and mouth. Healthy eating, adequate sleep and physical activity are essential to your health.

By frequently washing your hands you wash away germs, viruses and bacteria that you have picked up from other people, or from contaminated surfaces, or from animals and animal waste. Influenza virus can live up to two days on hard surfaces. Washing hard surfaces (sinks, counters, etc.) with a disinfectant such as a ten percent bleach solution (one part bleach and nine parts water) will kill the influenza virus. Surfaces that are frequently touched with hands should be cleaned often. Careful, thorough cleaning of surfaces is effective in removing the influenza virus and many other germs.

It is a wise precaution to send home any employees who have flu signs/symptoms. Retaining sick employees in the confines of a workplace will increase the likelihood of further spread of the disease. This general precaution applies in educational and other establishments to people other than employees, including children, students, and attendees.

If you have employees who can safely work from home, this should be identified and encouraged. Opt for video or phone conferencing where possible instead of holding meetings. Remote electronic working, where feasible, will reduce face-to-face meetings. Utilize the phone, email, fax instead of meeting.

Throughout the duration of a pandemic, it is likely that your workforce will be depleted. In these circumstances, it is important to ensure that appropriate training is given to remaining workers required to carry out unfamiliar tasks. You may need to review risk assessments and apply the necessary control measures to take account of the reduced workforce and the remaining pool of skills available to maintain your business. Young workers and pregnant workers should not be substituted into inappropriate work.

Use air conditioning when possible. The main advantage of air conditioning is that it has a dilution effect on stale or contaminated air, and provides a more comfortable environment.

Use your hand towel in a public washroom to dry your hands, turn on the tap and open the door. Door handles are one of the dirtiest spots in a washroom. Wash your hands before a meeting where you know you will be shaking hands, especially when you have a cold.

## Pandemic Flu

# Self Diagnosis

**How do I know if I have influenza?**
You may have influenza if you have a sudden onset of a respiratory illness with a cough, fever, headache, muscle pain, a runny nose, sore throat, and body aches. Sometimes, but not very often, children with influenza can have nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. Sometimes adults over 65 and children under five may not have a fever when sick with influenza. Although colds and other viruses may cause similar symptoms, influenza weakens a person much more than other viruses. Most healthy people will feel better in about five to seven days but symptoms may last for two to three weeks. Complications of influenza, such as pneumonia, can be more severe for the elderly, infants or people with chronic health problems.

**How long is the influenza virus infectious/contagious?**
A person with the flu is contagious 24 hours before they become sick and for three to five days after becoming sick. Some children may be contagious for longer than a week. The virus can live for up to two days on hard surfaces such as doorknobs, handrails, toys, cups, utensils and telephones. It can live on the hands for up to five minutes. The time from when a person is first exposed to the flu virus to when symptoms begin is one to three days.

**What to expect with influenza**
Influenza usually begins with a sudden onset of a respiratory illness with a cough, fever, headache, muscle pain, a runny nose, sore throat and body aches. In a few days, fever and muscle aches will decrease and a sore throat, cough and mild chest discomfort may become more noticeable. Most healthy people will feel better in five to seven days but symptoms may last for two to three weeks. It is not necessary to seek medical attention if you have symptoms of influenza unless you are concerned about your symptoms or your symptoms worsen. Persons with chronic health problems may need to seek medical attention.

## Pandemic Flu

# Self Treatment

**Antibiotics will not work against influenza. Antibiotics treat bacterial infections, but influenza is cause by a virus.**

**Always use a tissue to cover your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing. Throw the tissue away after use and wash your hands immediately.**

**What can I do if my family or I get sick?**
Providing care to a person with influenza at home will be common during influenza pandemic. Ask for help from family members or friends if you live alone, are a single parent with small children, and are having a hard time taking care of your own or your family's needs.

**Stay home when you are feeling ill**
Do not go to work or school as you could spread influenza to others. You should avoid other people until seven days after your symptoms start to avoid spreading the virus to others. Persons who are ill should stay in their rooms as much as possible to maintain physical separation from family members who are not ill. If more than one person is ill, a room may be shared.

**Get plenty of rest**
You will probably feel tired and weak. Resting will allow your body to recover from influenza.

**Drink plenty of fluids**
Extra fluids such as water, juice, and chicken soup are needed to replace the fluids lost especially if you have a fever. If your urine is dark, you need to drink more fluids. Try to drink a glass of water for every hour that you are awake. Warm fluids may also help loosen mucus in your throat and lungs.

**Treat fever or muscle aches at home**
Taking Acetaminophen (Tylenol™) may provide some comfort. Always follow the directions on the package as to how much and how frequently you should take Acetaminophen. Acetaminophen is a good choice as it causes less stomach upset than other pain medications.

**Never give any products containing aspirin to any child under the age of 18 years.** Giving aspirin products may lead to Reye's syndrome, a serious condition affecting the nervous system and the liver.

**Take over-the-counter cough and influenza remedies**
Tell the pharmacist if you are taking other medications or if you have any chronic medical conditions. If you have a cough you may want to take a cough suppressant for a dry nagging cough or an expectorant to help loosen the mucus. Decongestants may help with a stuffy nose and throat lozenges may help a sore throat. Consult your pharmacist or family doctor for advice on the medication that is right for you and your symptoms.

It is possible that during a pandemic, you will hear stories of cures and medications promising to prevent or cure influenza. Beware of false promises. If you have any doubts or questions about a product, speak with a pharmacist or your family physician.

**Fevers**

In most cases, fever is not serious and it is a sign that the person's body is working to fight off an illness. If you do not have access to a thermometer, you can check for a fever by touching the skin of the person who is sick. If the skin is hot and dry, cheeks are flushed, lips and mouth are dry and the or she has the chills, they probably have a fever.

**How to bring down a fever and make your child or family member more comfortable:**

- ♦ Take off heavy clothing and blankets so that the heat may leave the body
- ♦ Dress in lightweight clothing
- ♦ Give a lukewarm sponge or tub bath. Never use alcohol rubs.
- ♦ Offer cool fluids frequently when the child or adult is awake
- ♦ Give Acetaminophen (Tylenol™) every four to six hours for comfort and to reduce. **Never give aspirin to children.**
- ♦ Allow the child/person to rest and stay home if possible for at least seven days to avoid spreading influenza to other people.