

# Pandemic Flu

## General Information



## PANDEMIC FLU

- Pandemic flu happens when a new flu virus spreads to people all over the world.
- Pandemic flu is not the same as seasonal flu (see Seasonal Flu vs. Pandemic Flu).
- Getting a flu shot or nasal spray is the best way to protect yourself from seasonal flu.
- Pandemic flu might make people sicker than seasonal flu and might spread easily to others because there would be no vaccine at first.

## HOW PANDEMIC FLU SPREADS

- Pandemic flu may spread the same way as seasonal flu, but we will not know until it happens.
- When a person with pandemic flu sneezes, coughs, talks or laughs the pandemic flu virus can spread into the air as droplets.
- The droplets can spread to people and surfaces up to 6 feet away.
- The pandemic flu virus can spread to your hands if you touch anything that has the virus on it. If you then touch your eyes, nose or mouth, you might get pandemic flu.

## SYMPTOMS OF PANDEMIC FLU

- Until a new flu virus causes a pandemic, the symptoms are not known.
- We expect pandemic flu symptoms to be similar to seasonal flu, but they may be worse and new symptoms could occur.
- Usual symptoms of seasonal flu are:
  - ▶ Fever (usually high)
  - ▶ Headache
  - ▶ Tiredness (can be extreme)
  - ▶ Cough
  - ▶ Sore throat
  - ▶ Runny or stuffy nose
  - ▶ Body aches
  - ▶ Nausea and vomiting
  - ▶ Diarrhea (more in children)

## TYPES OF PANDEMIC FLU

- Flu pandemics have occurred throughout history and are caused by new strains of flu viruses.
  - ▶ Avian flu comes from a flu virus that affects mainly birds that has spread to humans.
  - ▶ Swine flu comes from a flu virus that affects mainly pigs that has spread to humans.

*In the past, flu pandemics were given names. You may have heard of the 1918 “Spanish flu,” “Asian flu” in 1957, or “Hong Kong flu” in 1968. The flu pandemic of 2010 was called H1N1.*

**Stay home when sick • Clean your hands  
Cover your coughs and sneezes**

# Seasonal Flu vs. Pandemic Flu

## Seasonal Flu

- › Getting a flu shot or the nasal spray each year is the best way to protect yourself from seasonal flu.
- › Outbreaks occur each year, mostly in the winter.
- › The viruses that cause seasonal flu are like the ones from the past few years. That's why many people can fight off the illness.
- › Not all people who get sick will need to go to the hospital, so there is space for those who are really sick.
- › Healthy adults usually don't get very sick. The very young, the elderly, and people with chronic health problems could get extremely ill.
- › A flu vaccine (flu shot or nasal spray) is made each year to prevent the spread of seasonal flu.
- › A person can start to spread seasonal flu to others about 1 day before they feel sick, and up to 5 days after becoming sick.

## Pandemic Flu

- › Happens when a new flu virus spreads to people all over the world.
- › Because the virus is new, many more people are likely to get sick after being exposed.
- › So many people will get sick that hospitals and health care providers may not be able to handle all the people who need care.
- › People of any age and even healthy people could get very ill.
- › A vaccine for pandemic flu may not be available when pandemic flu first breaks out. It may take 4 to 6 months to make the first doses of pandemic-specific vaccine.
- › No one knows for sure how fast pandemic flu will make a person sick or spread to others.

## LEARN MORE AT:

[www.publichealth.va.gov/flu](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/flu)

[www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)

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