



## Pandemic Influenza Fact Sheet

### What Is an Influenza Pandemic?\*

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza A virus emerges for which there is little or no immunity in the human population, begins to cause serious illness and then spreads easily person-to-person worldwide.

### Historically, the 20th century saw 3 pandemics of influenza:

- 1918 influenza pandemic caused at least 675,000 U.S. deaths and up to 50 million deaths worldwide
- 1957 influenza pandemic caused at least 70,000 U.S. deaths and 1-2 million deaths worldwide
- 1968 influenza pandemic caused about 34,000 U.S. deaths and 700,000 deaths worldwide

### Characteristics and challenges of a pandemic

#### 1. Rapid Worldwide Spread

- When a pandemic influenza virus emerges, its global spread is considered inevitable.
- Preparedness activities should assume that the entire world population would be susceptible.
- Countries might, through measures such as border closures and travel restrictions, delay arrival of the virus, but cannot stop it.

#### 2. Health Care Systems Overloaded

- Most people have little or no immunity to a pandemic virus. Infection and illness rates soar. A substantial percentage of the world's population will require some form of medical care.
- Nations unlikely to have the staff, facilities, equipment and hospital beds needed to cope with large numbers of people who suddenly fall ill.
- Death rates are high, largely determined by four factors: the number of people who become infected, the virulence of the virus, the underlying characteristics and vulnerability of affected populations and the effectiveness of preventive measures.
- Past pandemics have spread globally in two and sometimes three waves.

#### 3. Medical Supplies Inadequate

- The need for vaccine is likely to outstrip supply if available.
- The need for effective antiviral drugs is also likely to be inadequate if available during a pandemic.
- The CDC has developed prioritization guidelines for those who should receive antiviral medications or vaccination.
- A pandemic can create a shortage of hospital beds, ventilators and other supplies. Surge capacity at non-traditional sites such as schools may be created to cope with demand
- Difficult decisions will need to be made regarding who gets antiviral drugs and vaccines.

#### 4. Economic and Social Disruption

- Travel bans, closings of schools and businesses and cancellations of events could have major impact on communities and citizens.
- Care for sick family members and fear of exposure can result in significant worker absenteeism.

#### 5. Non-pharmaceutical Interventions

- Activities such as social distancing, voluntary isolation and quarantine, and clean hygiene practices will be the key to stopping the spread of a pandemic.

### Communications and Information are Critical Components of Pandemic Response

Education and outreach are critical to preparing for a pandemic. Understanding what a pandemic is, what needs to be done at all levels to prepare for pandemic influenza, and what could happen during a pandemic helps us make informed decisions both as individuals and as a nation. Should a pandemic occur the public must be able to depend on its government to provide scientifically sound public health information quickly, openly and dependably. For additional information on pandemic influenza visit: [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov) or for Maryland related pandemic influenza information visit: <http://bioterrorism.dhmm.state.md.us/>



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### How Does Seasonal Flu Differ From Pandemic Flu?\*

Seasonal Flu	Pandemic Flu
Outbreaks follow predictable seasonal patterns; occurs annually, usually in winter, in temperate climates	Occurs rarely (three times in 20th century - last in 1968)
Usually some immunity built up from previous exposure	No previous exposure; little or no pre-existing immunity
Healthy adults usually not at risk for serious complications; the very young, the elderly and those with certain underlying health conditions at increased risk for serious complications	Healthy people may be at increased risk for serious complications
Health systems can usually meet public and patient needs	Health systems may be overwhelmed
Vaccine developed based on known flu strains and available for annual flu season	Vaccine probably would not be available in the early stages of a pandemic
Adequate supplies of antivirals are usually available	Effective antivirals may be in limited supply
Average U.S. deaths approximately 36,000/yr	Number of deaths could be quite high (e.g., U.S. 1918 death toll approximately 675,000)
Symptoms: fever, cough, runny nose, muscle pain. Deaths often caused by complications, such as pneumonia.	Symptoms may be more severe and complications more frequent
Generally causes modest impact on society (e.g., some school closing, encouragement of people who are sick to stay home)	May cause major impact on society (e.g. widespread restrictions on travel, closings of schools and businesses, cancellation of large public gatherings)
Manageable impact on domestic and world economy	Potential for severe impact on domestic and world economy

### Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

- Avian influenza - commonly called "bird flu" - is an infection caused by influenza viruses that occur naturally in birds.
- Wild birds can carry the viruses, but usually do not get sick from them. However, some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks, and turkeys, can become infected, often fatally
- One strain of avian influenza, the H5N1 virus, is endemic in much of Asia and has spread into parts of Europe and Africa. Avian H5N1 infections have recently killed poultry and other birds in a number of countries.
- Strains of avian H5N1 influenza may infect various types of animals, including wild birds, pigs, and tigers.
- Symptoms in birds and other animals vary, but virulent strains can cause death within a few days.

### Avian Influenza Low Pathogenic H5N1 vs. Highly Pathogenic H5N1\*\*

There are two types of avian influenza (AI) that are identified as H5N1. A difference exists in the virus classification; one is low pathogenic (LPAI) and the other is highly pathogenic (HPAI). Pathogenicity refers to the ability of the virus to produce disease. HPAI H5N1, often referred to as the "Asian" H5N1, is the type causing worldwide concern. LPAI H5N1, often referred to as the "North American" H5N1, is of less concern.

\*Source: United States Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)

\*\* Source: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)