

Pandemic Flu

Family Guide to Preparations

A flu pandemic is a global outbreak of influenza that occurs when a new flu virus appears to which people have little or no immunity. Pandemic flu spreads easily from person to person and can cause serious illness because people do not have immunity to the new virus. Seasonal flu outbreaks are caused by viruses to which people have already been exposed, flu shots are available to help prevent widespread illness and effects on society are less severe.

It is difficult to predict accurately when influenza pandemics will occur, how severe they will be or how long they will last. A pandemic may come and go in waves, each of which can last for months at a time. Everyday life could be disrupted due to people in communities across the country becoming ill at the same time. These disruptions could include everything from school and business closings to interruption of basic services such as public transportation and health care. An especially severe influenza pandemic could lead to high levels of illness, death, social disruption and economic loss.

The effects of a pandemic can be lessened, however, if preparations are made ahead of time.

As you plan, it is important to think about the challenges you might face, particularly if a pandemic is severe. It may take time to find the answers to these challenges.

The following are some situations that could be caused by a severe pandemic and possible ways to address them.

Social Disruption May Be Widespread

- Plan for the possibility that usual services may be disrupted. Such services could include those provided by hospitals and other health care facilities, banks, stores, restaurants, government offices and post offices.
- Prepare backup plans in case public gatherings, such as volunteer meetings and worship services, are canceled.
- Consider how to care for people with special needs in case the services they rely on are not available.

Being Able to Work May Be Difficult Or Impossible

- Find out if you can work from home.
- Ask your employer how business will continue during a pandemic.
- Plan for the possible reduction or loss of income if you are unable to work or your place of employment is closed.
- Check with your employer about leave policies.

Schools May Be Closed for an Extended Period of Time

- Help schools plan for pandemic influenza. Talk to the school nurse or health center staff. Talk to your teachers, administrators and parent-teacher organizations.
- Plan home learning activities and exercises. Have materials such as books on hand. Plan recreational activities that your children can do at home.
- Consider child care needs.

Transportation Services May Be Disrupted

- Think about how you can rely less on public transportation during a pandemic. For example, store food and other essential supplies so you make fewer trips to the store.

- Prepare backup plans for taking care of loved ones who are ar away.
- Consider other ways to get to work; or, if you can, work at home.

People Will Need Advice and Help at Work and Home

- Think about what information the people in your workplace will need if you are a manager. This may include information about insurance, leave policies, working from home, possible loss of income and when not to come to work if sick.
- Meet with your colleagues and make lists of things that you will need to know and what actions can be taken.
- Find volunteers who want to help people in need, such as elderly neighbors, single parents of small children or people without the resources to get the medical help they will need.
- Identify other information resources in your community, such as mental health hotlines, public health hotlines or electronic bulletin boards. Learn about the 2-1-1 phone system in your community.
- Find support systems – people who are thinking about the same issues you are thinking about. Share ideas.

Be Prepared

Have a family emergency supply kit and be prepared for interruptions in utility services. Stocking supplies can be useful in other types of emergencies as well. Consider the following:

- **Food and water**

Have a 10-day supply of non-perishable canned and dried food and fresh water on hand. Stock up on canned or dried meats, fish, beans, peanut butter, vegetables, fruit, cereal, powdered or canned milk, crackers and baby food.

- **Household supplies**

Stock up on household supplies, personal items and pet food. Using disposable dishes and plastic utensils will help conserve water. Have a supply of large trash bags. Garbage services may be disrupted or postponed for days.

- **Personal items**

Have extra items on hand to make your time at home more comfortable. Stock up on soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toilet paper and cleaning supplies. Have activities for the family.

- **Utilities**

Basic utilities such as electricity and water should remain on, but disruptions may occur. Have candles, kerosene lamps, flashlights or lanterns on hand with plenty of fresh batteries. Plan how to heat a home and cook without power. Do not use kerosene stoves or charcoal in an enclosed area including an indoor fireplace. Do not run a generator indoors.

- **Telephone**

Have available a phone that does not run on power from an electrical outlet. Some standard wired phones and cordless phones will not operate when the power is out. Cellular phones may still be in service. Hand crank generators for charging cell phone batteries are available.

- **Safety**

Have a battery-powered radio with AM, FM, and short wave capability and plenty of batteries. Have a first aid kit available to care for minor injuries.

- **Medications**

Speak with your pharmacist about getting an extra month's supply of medications routinely taken by family members. Have acetaminophen (such as Tylenol®) and a thermometer in your medicine cabinet. Learn how to read a thermometer correctly.

Have medications to treat flu symptoms and children's electrolyte replacement drinks such as Pedialyte® on hand.

- **Pets**

Make sure you have food, water, medications and necessities such as litter and bedding for your pets.

- **Cash**

Have some cash available to purchase needed goods during a pandemic.

- **Emergency plans**

Talk to friends and family about emergency plans. Be sure you have a plan to check in with elderly parents and friends. Teach children who to contact in an emergency. Pull together your family's medical histories, social security numbers and other basic information.

Stay Healthy

Take common-sense steps to limit the spread of germs. Make good hygiene a habit.

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Put used tissues in a waste basket.
- Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue.
- Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Stay at home if you are sick.
- Routinely wipe down and disinfect surfaces with a solution of 1 part household bleach and 9 parts water. It is always a good idea to practice good health habits.

- Eat a balanced diet. Be sure to eat a variety of foods, including plenty of vegetables, fruits and whole grain products. Include low-fat dairy products, lean meats, poultry, fish and beans. Drink lots of water and go easy on salt, sugar, alcohol and saturated fat.
- Exercise on a regular basis and get plenty of rest.
- Stop or reduce habits such as tobacco or alcohol use that could be detrimental to your health.
- If you do not have a primary care provider who is familiar with your health, find one. It may be difficult to find one during a pandemic flu outbreak.

Get Informed

To Learn More About The Flu:

- Texas Department of State Health Services Web site:
www.dshs.state.tx.us
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Public Response Hotline:
800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) (English and Spanish)
888-232-6348 (TTY)
e-mail: inquiry@cdc.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site:
www.cdc.gov
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Web site:
www.pandemicflu.gov
- Northeast Texas Public Health District web site:
www.healthpreparedness.org