

**(Long version of article)**

**Pandemic Influenza: What is it and What can you do?**

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. Pandemic influenza is not your regular seasonal flu that comes between the months of December and March. A flu pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which people have little or no immunity, and for which there is no vaccine. The disease spreads easily person-to-person, causes serious illness, and can sweep across the country and around the world in very short time.

Recently, experts have discovered a new type of flu virus that has infected and killed many birds. This virus causes a flu called avian flu (bird flu) or H5N1. Health professionals are concerned that the continued spread of a highly pathogenic avian H5N1 virus across eastern Asia and other countries represents a significant threat to human health. The H5N1 virus has raised concerns about a potential human pandemic. Since 2003, a growing number of human H5N1 cases have been reported and more than half of the people infected with the H5N1 virus have died. Most of these cases have been caused by exposure to infected poultry. There has been no sustained human-to-human transmission of the disease, and there has been no H5N1 avian flu identified in North America, but the concern is that H5N1 will evolve into a virus capable of human-to-human transmission. Symptoms of the bird flu are similar to those of seasonal flu, coughing, fever and chills, runny or stuffy nose and a sore throat.

The United States has been working closely with other countries and the World Health Organization (WHO) to strengthen systems to detect outbreaks of influenza that might cause a pandemic. The federal government will provide up-to-date information and guidance to the public should an influenza pandemic unfold.

Preparing your family for a flu pandemic is as important as preparing for any type of disaster. The effects of a pandemic can be lessened if preparations are made ahead of time. You can prepare by taking the usual common sense prevention measures against seasonal influenza: get a flu shot; stay home if you are sick; cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze; wash your hands often; and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Also exercise, eat healthy food and get plenty of rest. In addition to these steps, you should prepare a survival kit for your family with extra supplies of food and water, create a family emergency communications plan, stay informed and get involved. For more detailed information on how to prepare for the possibility of a pandemic and general emergency preparedness visit the following websites: [www.ReadyAnokaCounty.us](http://www.ReadyAnokaCounty.us), [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov), [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov), [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov), and [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) or call Anoka County Community Health and Environmental Services Department at 763-422-6965.

This message brought to you by Anoka County Community Health and Environmental Services Department

**(Mid-length version of article)**

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A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. A flu pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which people have little or no immunity, and for which there is no vaccine. The disease spreads easily person-to-person, causes serious illness, and can sweep across the country and around the world in very short time. Currently experts have discovered a new type of flu virus that has infected and killed many birds. This virus causes a flu called avian flu (bird flu) or H5N1. Health professionals are concerned that the continued spread of a highly pathogenic avian H5N1 virus across eastern Asia and other countries represents a significant threat to human health. The United States has been working closely with other countries and the World Health Organization (WHO) to strengthen systems to detect outbreaks of influenza that might cause a pandemic. Public health officials will provide up-to-date information and guidance to the public should an influenza pandemic unfold.

Preparing your family for a flu pandemic is as important as preparing for any type of disaster. You can prepare by taking the usual common sense prevention measures against seasonal influenza: get a flu shot; stay home if you are sick; cover your cough; and wash your hands. In addition to these steps you should prepare a survival kit for your family with extra supplies of food and water, create a family emergency communications plan, stay informed and get involved. For more detailed information on how to prepare for the possibility of a Pandemic and general emergency preparedness visit the following websites: [www.ReadyAnokaCounty.us](http://www.ReadyAnokaCounty.us), [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov), [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov), [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov), and [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) or call Anoka County Community Health and Environmental Services Department at 763-422-6965.

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Preparing your family for a flu pandemic is as important as preparing for any type of disaster. For more information on how to prepare for a pandemic, natural disaster, terrorist attack or other emergency visit, [www.ReadyAnokaCounty.us](http://www.ReadyAnokaCounty.us) , [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov) and [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) or call Anoka County Community Health and Environmental Services Department at 763-422-6965.

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