

Oregon Prepares

For More Information:

DHS Public Health

Public Information Officer
Bonnie Widerburg,
971-673-1282
Bonnie.L.Widerburg@state.or.us

You can also visit the following
Web site for more information on
Pandemic flu planning:

<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/spotlight/panflusummit.shtml>

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Pandemic Influenza Frequently Asked Questions

What is influenza?

Influenza is a respiratory illness that causes fever, body ache, cough and extreme fatigue. During a normal influenza season, which happens every year, 10-20% of the US population becomes ill and about 36,000 people nationwide die from influenza or its complications.

What is pandemic influenza?

An influenza pandemic is a global outbreak caused by a new influenza virus to which humans have no immunity. This means the virus can spread rapidly and that it is more likely to cause serious illness and death than annual influenza.

In the last century, there were 3 pandemics: 1918 "Spanish flu" caused 500,000 deaths in the United States and killed up to 40 million people worldwide; the 1957 "Asian flu" and the 1968 "Hong Kong flu" were much milder but still caused 70,000 and 34,000 United States death, respectively.

How likely is it that we will see a pandemic in our lifetime?

We can't predict when a pandemic will occur or how severe it will be, but one is likely because influenza viruses are always changing.

In a future pandemic, how many people will be affected?

The severity will depend on the virus that causes it, but it a particularly severe pandemic could overwhelm public health and health care systems and create social disruption. The most severe pandemic in recent history was that of 1918, when about 25% of the population got sick, and many were young adults. In the more typical pandemics, such as those of 1957 and 1968, about three times as many people get sick or die as in a usual flu season.

How will we know when a new influenza virus is identified?

Public health authorities in countries around the world are working together to improve disease detection and tracking. A worldwide network of laboratories is actively testing and sharing information about influenza viruses.

Will vaccines be available?

Vaccines will likely be in short supply at the start of a pandemic. Additionally, it takes six to 12 months to produce a vaccine that is effective against a new influenza strain.

How will authorities monitor and limit the spread of illness?

Not all illness can be prevented, but we can minimize illness and death through public health measures, including education for the public and health care providers, prioritization of available vaccines and antiviral medications, surveillance for rates of illness, monitoring of risk factors for severe disease, and coordination of health care resources.

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Is quarantine an option?

Public health would first call upon voluntary measures, such as advising people with respiratory symptoms to stay home from work or school and avoid public places.

Quarantine is the separation of people who have been exposed to an illness—but who are not yet ill—from other people. Quarantine would only be used if it could control the disease in question. For influenza, quarantine would only be used, if at all, during the earliest stages of the outbreak.

Isolation is the separation of people who are already ill from others in the community. Isolation, probably on a voluntary basis, would likely be recommended at all stages of a pandemic in an attempt to limit person to person spread.

What can I do to protect myself during a pandemic?

Stay informed. Practice good health habits—eat a balanced diet and get sufficient rest. Don't spread germs—cover your coughs and sneezes and wash your hands often. Stay away from sick people. If you are ill, stay away from others. As with any emergency, be prepared with a supply of essential supplies, such as food, water and prescription medicines.

What is the government doing to prepare for a pandemic?

The World Health Organization and countries throughout the world have developed emergency plans, as have the US Department of Health and Human Services and state governments, including Oregon, throughout the country. Oregon has a plan, and we will continue testing it so everyone that has a role is prepared to respond.

What does the President's plan provide?

The President's plan spends billions on stockpiling vaccine, medications and developing new vaccine. It calls for building up national reserves of antiviral medicines. But it allocates only \$100 million for state and local government—an insufficient amount for bolstering the public health systems that would be charged with delivering mass medications.

How can I prepare?

Stay informed. As with any emergency, you should be prepared with essential supplies, such as food, water and medicine.

Should I be stockpiling antivirals, such as Tamiflu and Relenza?

No. Supplies need to be reserved for people at risk of complications from annual influenza. It is not clear that these medications will work for new strains of influenza.

What about businesses, schools, and other community organizations?

A severe pandemic could have a significant impact on our economy and daily life. Businesses and communities should prepare as they would for other emergencies by identifying essential functions and planning for how they would provide a continuity of services.

Important clarification regarding pandemic influenza and avian influenza:

Currently, pandemic influenza is getting much attention because of a heightened concern that the H5N1 avian influenza could mutate and become transmissible among humans—and potentially lead to a pandemic. It is important to note that if a pandemic occurs, it might or might not be due to H5N1 avian influenza.