

West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Information for the Public on Avian and Pandemic Flu

What is avian flu?

Avian flu is a virus that makes birds sick and can cause death. It makes humans sick in rare cases. Human cases have occurred in Asia and Eastern Europe. No cases have occurred in North America.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

Ordinary flu can cause:

- fever and chills;
- headache and body aches; and,
- cough, sore throat and congestion.

Flu can lead to pneumonia, worsening of existing medical conditions and death. The very young and very old are at most risk, as well as those with other medical conditions.

Avian flu has caused much more serious illnesses in some people. These include pneumonia, respiratory and organ failure. The death rate for avian flu is 50%.

What treatment is available for avian flu?

Doctors have little or no experience in treating avian flu in people. Some people with avian flu have used a drug named Oseltamivir. It is believed that this drug might offer some protection if started within 48 hours of becoming sick.

What is pandemic flu?

A new type of flu virus causes pandemic flu. Because people have no resistance to this new virus, they get a worse form of the flu. About 36,000 people die each year in the U.S. due to the flu. Pandemic flu may increase that number by 10 to 50 times.

When will the next pandemic occur?

No one knows when the next pandemic will happen or what type of virus will cause it. Scientists worry that a pandemic will happen due to the number of human cases of avian flu. For a pandemic to happen, virus would have to change so that it can pass easily between people. It is very rare for the avian flu to pass between people.

What should I do to get ready for pandemic influenza?

Get the facts. These websites have excellent, up-to-date information on avian flu:

World Health Organization:

http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/index.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic/>

Chronic diseases like diabetes, heart lung disease can add to the risk complications or death from flu. Take these steps to improve your overall health and readiness:

1. Get the most out of personal and family health by:
 - Eating a balanced diet:
 - Include plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
 - Drink plenty of water.
 - Include low fat dairy products, lean meats, fish, poultry and beans.
 - Limit salt, saturated fat, sugar and alcohol.
 - Exercise regularly; and
 - Stop smoking.
2. Avoid unnecessary use of antiviral and antibiotic drugs. Resistant viruses and bacteria are harder to treat.
3. Know how to stay healthy and keep others healthy.
 - Wash your hands with soap and water regularly.
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
 - Throw used tissues away in the trash.
 - Wash hands after coughing or sneezing. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleanser.
 - Stay at home, if you are ill.

Take the following steps to reduce your chance of getting sick from disease carried by animals, livestock (including chickens and ducks) and pets:

- Avoid contact with sick animals.
- Contact a veterinarian if your animals appear sick.
- Hunt only animals that look healthy.
- Wear gloves when handling or processing animals.
- Wash hands after touching any animal, including dogs and cats.
- Cook all meat and eggs thoroughly before eating.
- Wash cooking utensils and food preparation areas with soap and hot water.
- Wash hands often when cooking.

Here are some other preparations you could make:

- Be ready to take care of loved ones at home if hospital beds are in short supply.
- Have enough savings to ride out some hard economic times.
- Store food and water in your house in case supplies run short.
- If possible, plan to work and care for children at home.

Volunteer your services to the Red Cross, your local hospital, your local health department or other community agencies and organizations to help others.

What should I expect during a pandemic?

- Deaths and hospital admissions will greatly increase.
- As much as 30% of people may become sick, causing shortages of goods and services.
- Food, fuel and medical care might be in short supply.

A pandemic flu could cost the world \$800 billion each year. Losses might include:

- effects on poultry farming;
- lower demand for services; and,
- loss of business production due to illness and death.

Some expect it will take six months to develop a vaccine against a new flu virus. Doctors will have to manage limited supplies of antiviral drugs, treating the sickest patients, community workers, doctors and nurses first.

You also should listen for instructions from your local and state health departments. You may be asked to stay at home for a time or to limit your actions outside of your house.

What treatment will be available during a pandemic?

It is not possible to predict what might be available during the next pandemic. There are many questions, including:

1. Will antiviral drugs work against the pandemic virus?
2. Will there be enough antiviral drugs to treat everyone?
3. Will an effective vaccine be available, and if so, when?

Nobody has the answers to all these questions. Many people are working hard to understand the avian flu better.

For more information:

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab3.html>

<http://www.wvflu.org>