



Influenza, or the “flu”, is a contagious, respiratory disease caused by different strains of the virus. Each year the seasonal flu affects people throughout the world. More recently two new strains of the virus, H5N1 and 2009 novel H1N1, were discovered and spread worldwide. While most healthy people recover from the flu without problems, some are at high risk for serious complications. Pets may also become infected from their sick owners. Prevention is the key to protecting your family and pets from these viruses.

## Prevention Measures

- **Practice good health habits to maintain your body’s resistance to infection and avoid getting sick.**
  - Eat a balanced diet.
  - Drink plenty of fluids.
  - Exercise daily.
  - Manage stress.
  - Get plenty of rest/sleep.
  - Avoid close contact with sick people.
- **Get vaccinated.**
  - Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to minimize illness and death.
  - The 2010-2011 seasonal influenza vaccine will protect against the 2009 H1N1 virus and two other common influenza virus strains (H3N2 and influenza B).
- **Stockpile supplies.**
  - Have plenty of nonprescription drugs, such as pain relievers, cold medicines, vitamins, tissues, and hand sanitizer on hand.

## If You Become Ill

- **Signs of the flu include:**
  - Rapid onset of high fever and body aches
  - Headache, extreme tiredness, sore throat, cough, runny or stuffy nose
  - Vomiting and diarrhea may occur, but are more common in children
- **Prevent transmission.**
  - Flu is spread person-to-person by coughing or sneezing of an infected person or by contamination of surfaces from these fluids.
  - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing and throw the tissue in the trash after use.
  - If there is no tissue available, cough or sneeze into your elbow to avoid spreading germs.
  - Wash hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

- **If someone in your household develop signs of the flu,**
  - Stay home from work, school and other public places until you have been fever-free (without fever-reducing medicine) for at least 24 hours.
  - Get plenty of sleep and drink lots of fluids.
  - Eat to keep your strength up.
  - Designate one person as the caregiver – this will help minimize further spread.
  - Keep personal items separate. Avoid sharing pens, papers, clothes, towels, sheets, blankets, food or eating utensils – unless cleaned between uses.
  - Disinfect doorknobs, switches, handles, computers, telephones, toys and other commonly touched surfaces.
  - Wash dishes in the dishwasher or by hand using very hot water and soap.
  - Wash clothing with detergent and hot water; wash your hands after handling dirty laundry.
  - Wear disposable gloves when cleaning up body fluids; wash your hands after removing gloves.
- **Seek treatment.**
  - Many different illnesses can have similar signs.
  - Talk to your healthcare provider about possible medications (e.g., antivirals) that may make illness milder and help speed recovery.
  - Beware of bogus products and scams. The FDA warns the public to be wary of internet sites and other promotions for products that claim to prevent, treat, or cure the flu.

## Individuals at High Risk

- **Some people are considered high risk for flu-related complications. These include:**
  - People age 50 or older
  - Pregnant women
  - People with chronic medical conditions
  - Children age 6 months and older
  - People who live with or care for those at high risk
- **High risk individuals should consult their healthcare provider about needed prevention measures.**

## Influenza and Your Pets

Influenza viruses can cause illness in your pet. Dogs, cats, ferrets and pet birds can be susceptible to certain influenza viruses. Cases are not common, and most pets fully recover. Exposure can occur from sick owners. Prevention is the key to protect your pet from flu viruses.

- **Keep your pet healthy.**
  - Have animals seen regularly by your veterinarian to ensure they are healthy.
  - Feed them a well-balanced diet.

- **Monitor your pet for illness. Contact your veterinarian if you see these signs,**
  - Lethargy, loss of appetite
  - Fever
  - Runny nose and/or eyes
  - Sneezing, coughing
  - Difficulty or changes in breathing
- **If you are sick with influenza-like-illness,**
  - Take the same precautions with your pets that you would to keep family and friends healthy.
  - Cover your coughs and sneezes.
  - Wash your hands frequently.
  - Avoid or minimize contact with your pets until 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of fever reducing medication.
- **There is currently no vaccine for the pandemic influenza strains available for pets.**

## Prepare for a Pandemic Situation

The impact of a severe pandemic could be much more damaging than that of regular flu season. It could lead to high levels of illness or death. Everyday life could become disrupted due to large numbers of people becoming seriously ill at the same time. Impacts could range from school and business closings to the interruption of basic services, such as public transportation or food delivery.

- **Don't panic.**
  - Plan ahead for the situation.
- **Stay informed.**
  - Listen to the radio or television for information and updates.
  - Follow the situation at [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov).
  - Follow instructions from public health and medical health professionals. This may involve staying at home to avoid further spread of the virus.
- **Plan for disruption in essential services.**
  - Transportation and consumer services (e.g., hospitals, healthcare facilities, banks, restaurants, government offices, phone companies, post offices) may be disrupted during a pandemic.

### Food and water supplies may be interrupted.

- Temporary shortages could occur or you may not be able to get to a store.
- Store at least one to two weeks supply of non-perishable food.
- Store two weeks of water – 1 gallon of water per person per day. (2 quarts for drinking, 2 quarts for food preparation/sanitation).

- **Being able to work may be difficult or impossible.**
  - Ask your employer how your business will function during a pandemic.
  - Discuss alternatives such as, staggered shifts or working at home with your employer. Discuss telecommuting possibilities, accessing remote networks, and using portable computers.
  - Discuss with your employer how much leave you can take to care for yourself or a family member. Discuss possible flexibility in leave policies.
  - Plan for possible loss of income if you are unable to work or the company you work for temporarily closes.
- **Schools and daycare centers may be closed for an extended period of time.**
  - Talk to your teachers and administrators about your school's pandemic plan.
  - Plan for children staying at home for extended periods of time, as school closings may occur along with restrictions on public gatherings, such as at malls or movie theaters.
  - Plan home learning activities and exercises that your children can do at home. Have learning materials, such as books, school supplies, and educational computer activities on hand.
  - Have materials and activities (e.g., reading books, coloring books, games), on hand for your children to use.
- **Medical care for people with chronic illness could be disrupted.**
  - In a severe pandemic, hospitals and doctors' offices may be overwhelmed.
  - If you have a chronic disease, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma, or depression, you should continue taking medication as prescribed by your doctor.
  - Make sure you have necessary medical supplies.
  - Talk to your healthcare provider to ensure adequate access to your medications.
  - If you receive ongoing medical care, such as dialysis, chemotherapy, or other therapies, talk with your healthcare provider about plans to continue care during a pandemic.

*Development of this educational material was by the Center for Food Security and Public Health with funding from the Multi-State Partnership for Security in Agriculture MOU-2010-HSEMD-004. June 2010.*

