



Citizen Corps News:

What You Can Do to Plan and Prepare for a Possible Pandemic Flu

The U.S. Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Health and Human Services (HHS), including the HHS Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have the lead roles for the nation's response to the H1N1 flu outbreak. For more information on the H1N1 flu, visit www.dhs.gov; www.hhs.gov; and www.cdc.gov.

As health officials combat the new influenza virus known as H1N1 or swine flu with detection, diagnosis, and treatment protocols, it's important to realize that managing a major disease outbreak requires participation from everyone. This recent flu outbreak reminds us how important it is to be prepared and how we all need to take the time now to get ready for a possible pandemic flu.

The federal government and each state/territory are required to have a Pandemic Flu plan in place which goes into effect in the event a pandemic flu. These plans are to ensure government services continue and to manage public communications and guidance on the possible need for social distancing, to include school closings and telework options. But the government alone can't prepare the nation for a possible pandemic flu; this challenge requires your help.

Everyone in America needs to prepare themselves and their family to be safe from the spread of disease or from any other possible disaster or crisis situation. Below are some of the recommended actions to take when preparing for a possible pandemic disease outbreak.

- **Practice good hygiene.** Ensure you and your family members always practice flu prevention principles, such as:
 - Use good cough etiquette. Cough and sneeze into your sleeve or a tissue, not your hands.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
 - Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
 - If you get sick with influenza, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- **Stay informed.** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services maintains a website, www.PandemicFlu.gov, that provides guidance, including checklists, for individuals, families, businesses and all sectors on what to do before, during, and after a pandemic flu. View the following HHS Webcast to learn more about Individual Pandemic Preparedness: www.pandemicflu.gov/news/panflu_webinar6.html. The Centers for Disease for Control and Prevention website, www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu, includes up-to-date information on the H1N1 flu outbreak.

- **Get local information.** Call or visit the website for your local health department to learn their plans and recommendations for a potential disease outbreak in your community. Ask how you can receive updated information on local outbreaks, how you learn about prevention safety measures (including hand-washing, social-distancing, anti-viral medications), and who to contact if you become ill or have questions.
- **Review your family plan.** Ensure that your family disaster plan is up-to-date and that family members know what to do both for a disease outbreak and for other emergency situations, including what to do at home, work, school or other locations and what to do if your means of transportation is disrupted, such as if public transit services are not available. Think about measures you can take to protect your family and property. And be sure to address what additional precautions should be taken for those family members with special needs.
- **Think about all likely emergencies.** Take this opportunity to make sure your family plan includes contingencies for different types of hazards and ensure all family members understand and practice the plan. Consider the possibility of more than one hazard occurring at the same time, such as a disease outbreak and a power outage. More information on creating a family disaster plan can be found on the following websites: www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/individual/index.html and www.fema.gov/areyouready.
- **Prepare supplies for possible social distancing measures.** Social distancing, or limited personal interaction, is an important preventative measure to reduce the spread of disease. If a pandemic situation occurs, you may be asked to stay in your home, with limited access to outside sources of food or services. Prepare to reduce your need to go public places by store a two-week supply of water and non-perishable food for the entire family, including pets. Have two weeks of your regular prescription drugs at home and keep other health supplies on hand, including pain relievers and cold medicines. Be sure to check expiration dates on prescription and nonprescription drugs. The following website provides a list of recommended items to sustain your family during a pandemic flu: www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/individuals.pdf.
- **Learn how to care for someone who gets sick.** Learn what to do if you or your family members become sick with the flu. Visit www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance_homecare.htm for current information on how to care for sick family members and prevent the spread of the flu. In addition, up-to-date flu outbreak information is available in English and Spanish, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at the CDC Hotline (1-800-CDC-INFO).
- **Update medical records.** Ensure you have current medical records and other official documents on all family members. Create a summary sheet on Family Emergency Health Information. Visit the following website for a template: www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/individual/familyhealthinfo.html.

- **Update emergency contacts.** Update your emergency contacts and ensure that all family members have this information. Choose an out-of-town contact and teach your children how to call that person. Teach your children when and how to dial 9-1-1. The following websites provide sample emergency contact lists that can be handed out to all family members: www.ready.gov/america/downloads/familyemergencyplan.pdf and www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/individual/emergencycontacts.html.
- **Talk to your employer.** Ask your employer about its business plan during a pandemic flu. It will be important to know if you can work from home and what the policies are for extended absences and other office protocols. If you commute to work with others, be sure to discuss contingency plans if participants become ill or if their working hours change.
- **Talk to your children.** Parents should talk to their children about the flu virus and how it is impacting your family and community. Your children may need extra attention from you and may want to talk about their concerns and questions. Explain why it is important to practice good hygiene habits, why schools may close, and any new rules in your home. In the absence of factual information, children often imagine situations far worse than reality. Don't ignore their concerns, but rather explain that at the present moment the vast majority of people, even those who are sick, will be okay. The interactive website, www.scrubclub.org, provides information and interactive games to teach children ages 3-8 about germs and the proper way to wash their hands. For more information about talking to your children about the H1N1 flu outbreak, visit the following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention webpage: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/talkingtokids.htm.
- **Check with school and childcare facilities.** Talk to your schools, including childcare service providers and colleges, about their pandemic flu plan. Find out the steps your school will take to prevent the spread of flu, including hygiene lessons/enforcement, identification and removal of sick children, and closings. If classes or school activities are cancelled for an extended period of time, be sure to establish a back-up child care plan or confirm telework or leave options with your employer. It is important to remember that the purpose of closing schools is to stop the spread of disease. If schools are closed, children will be expected to stay home rather than go to the mall, to a movie, or meet up with friends. If your children rely on nutrition programs while at school, identify alternative options to receive food. Visit the following site for school-related mitigation strategies and checklists: www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/school/index.html.
- **Discuss policies with elder care providers.** Talk to your family's elderly care service providers and nursing homes about their pandemic flu plan to ensure you are familiar with any changes in care. Hygiene enforcement and visitation procedures are likely to change during a pandemic.

- **Consider impacts on faith and social group activities.** If you participate in regular group activities, such as worship services, sports teams, book clubs, service groups, or volunteer programs, discuss how a possible pandemic flu might affect your meeting frequency and location, routine practices, and planned activities. Also consider what your group can do to help your community during disease outbreaks or other emergencies, such as collecting donations of supplies, checking on people who may need help, and providing child-care support.
- **Help others prepare.** Assist neighbors, family, friends, and co-workers in preparing for a possible pandemic disease outbreak, to include how you will share information during periods of limited access or social distancing. Be especially aware of those in your family and community with special needs who might need additional attention and assistance.
- **Follow travel advisories.** Follow CDC and local travel recommendations during a pandemic. Visit the following website for up-to-date information on travel notices: www.cdc.gov/travel.
- **Contact your local Citizen Corps Council.** Citizen Corps Councils are leadership councils made up of government and community leaders from all sectors that work towards involving everyone in the community for greater community safety, preparedness, and resilience. Your local Citizen Corps Council will have information on local community emergency response plans, personal preparedness, and ways you can get involved and volunteer for community preparedness and response activities. Visit the following website to find the Citizen Corps Council nearest you: www.citizencorps.gov.