



## PANDEMIC FLU — FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

**Q: WHAT IS INFLUENZA?**

A: Influenza, or the "flu", is a respiratory infection caused by the influenza virus. Complications of influenza can be severe leading to hospitalization and even death.

**Q: WHAT IS PANDEMIC INFLUENZA?**

A: Pandemic influenza is a global outbreak of disease from a new influenza A virus that is different from circulating seasonal viruses and different from past influenza viruses. Because people have not been infected with a similar virus in the past, most or all people will not have any natural immunity (protection) to a new pandemic virus.

**Q: HOW IS PANDEMIC DIFFERENT FROM REGULAR INFLUENZA SEASON?**

A: An influenza pandemic has little or nothing in common with the annual influenza season. Pandemic influenza would be a new strain and humans would have no natural protection against it. Also, there is a vaccine for seasonal influenza, but there would likely be no vaccine for a pandemic strain, and it would take multiple months to create one. Pandemic influenza may diverge from normal seasonal influenza patterns and occur at any time of year.

**Q: WHY IS PANDEMIC INFLUENZA SO SERIOUS?**

A: Because most or all people would not have protection against a new pandemic virus, large numbers of persons around the world can be infected. If the pandemic virus causes severe disease, there may be a large societal burden that depletes resources and healthcare capacity, and harms the economy.

Once a pandemic starts, it can spread rapidly around the world. The CDC predicts that as much as 25% to 30% of the US population could be affected.

**Q: CAN PANDEMIC INFLUENZA BE PREVENTED?**

A: The Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) is working with federal, state, and local government agencies to plan a response to pandemic influenza. The [Arizona Pandemic Influenza Response Plan](#) identifies Arizona-specific activities that may occur during an influenza pandemic. The World Health Organization is helping governments around the world prepare for the possibility of a pandemic.

It may not be possible to prevent or stop a pandemic once it begins. A person infected with influenza virus can be contagious a day before they feel sick, and for up to seven days thereafter, making it extremely easy for the virus to spread rapidly to large numbers of people.

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Although the federal government is stockpiling medical supplies and antiviral drugs, no country in the world has enough antiviral drugs to protect all its citizens. Antiviral drugs may be used to treat severe cases or prevent additional cases as long as supplies are available.

There currently is no vaccine to protect humans against a pandemic influenza virus because we do not know which virus will spark the next pandemic. However, vaccine development efforts are under way to protect humans against a pandemic influenza virus that might develop from current avian influenza viruses in Asia, A (H5N1) and A (H7N9). (See information on avian influenza below).

**Q: WHEN IS PANDEMIC INFLUENZA EXPECTED?**

A: Influenza pandemics occur naturally and with varying frequency. There were 3 pandemics in the 20th century. The pandemic of 1918 was the most severe pandemic on record, in which 50 million or more persons around the world died, including approximately 650,000 Americans.

It is not possible to predict accurately when influenza pandemics will occur or how severe they will be. However, the current outbreak of avian influenza in Asia has influenza experts concerned that the virus could mutate and cause a pandemic. The CDC, World Health Organization, and other influenza experts are monitoring the situation closely.

**Q: DO BUSINESSES AND SCHOOLS NEED TO PLAN FOR A PANDEMIC?**

A: Yes. In the event of pandemic influenza, businesses and schools will play a key role in protecting the health and safety of their employees and students, as well as limiting the negative impact to the economy and society. Planning for pandemic influenza is critical. To assist them in their efforts, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the CDC have developed a [checklist for businesses](#) and [a checklist for schools](#). It identifies important, specific activities employers and schools can do now to prepare, many of which will also help other emergencies.

**Q: WHY DOES THE CURRENT AVIAN INFLUENZA OUTBREAK IN ASIA POSE A RISK OF CAUSING A PANDEMIC INFLUENZA OUTBREAK IN HUMANS?**

A: New human influenza viruses arise from avian influenza viruses that then change to a form that can infect humans and spread readily from person to person. The current avian influenza outbreaks in Asia are caused by types of influenza A viruses, particularly H5N1 and H7N9.

The H5N1 outbreak among domestic chickens and ducks in Asia is widespread and uncontrolled. Human infections and deaths due to the H5N1 virus have occurred, although the virus has at this time not developed the ability to pass easily from person to person and cause outbreaks in humans.



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Human infections with H7N9 were first reported in China in March 2013. Since then there have been annual epidemics of sporadic human infections in China, with 2016–2017 experiencing the largest epidemic to date. At this point most human infections have occurred after exposure to poultry and there is no evidence of sustained person-to-person spread.

**Q: WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF AVIAN INFLUENZA IN HUMANS?**

A: The reported symptoms of avian influenza in humans have ranged from typical influenza-like symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches) to eye infections (conjunctivitis), pneumonia, acute respiratory distress, viral pneumonia, and other severe and life-threatening complications.

**Q: WHAT CAN THE PUBLIC DO TO REDUCE THE RISK OF PANDEMIC INFLUENZA?**

A:

**Stay Informed.** Regularly updated information about avian influenza and pandemic influenza:

- [World Health Organization](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\):](#)
  - [Spread of Avian Influenza Viruses among Birds](#)
  - [Avian Influenza Vaccines](#)
  - [Avian Influenza A Viruses](#)
- [National Institutes of Health](#) — Information on the vaccine development process

**Stop germs from spreading.** Cover your mouth and nose with tissue when coughing and sneezing. Wash your hands often. Stay home when you are sick.

- If traveling to Asia, visit [CDC Travelers' Health](#).
- For more information visit [PandemicFlu.gov](#).