

## **A MESSAGE TO EMPLOYERS: FROM THE PHILADELPHIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**



If you have seen recent headlines, you know that the global health community is closely monitoring the avian influenza outbreaks in Asia, Africa and Europe. Although avian influenza is caused by viruses that occur naturally among birds, several cases of human infection from a specific strain of bird flu, known as H5N1, have occurred since 1997. Experts fear that the avian influenza virus could mutate into a type that spreads easily from person to person, producing a worldwide outbreak.

A pandemic, or global outbreak, occurs when a new influenza virus emerges. Although influenza pandemics have occurred throughout recorded history, and three happened in the last century, the next pandemic will likely be different and unpredictable.

A pandemic is also different from the seasonal flu that occurs each year. A pandemic would be more severe than seasonal flu. It would circle the globe rapidly, and possibly cause millions of people to become sick. Should pandemic influenza reach the United States, experts predict that approximately 35% of the population would exhibit symptoms. In Philadelphia, with a population of approximately 1.517 million, about 530,950 people would fall ill over the six months of the epidemic.

How well the world would weather a global health disaster would depend largely on local preparedness efforts. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) Plan outlines the steps that are being taken to prepare and respond to a potential influenza pandemic. Businesses also should become engaged and take some sensible steps. It is crucial that employers understand the gravity of a potential pandemic and begin now to prepare themselves.

PDPH is pleased to provide you with a packet of information on preparing for an influenza pandemic. We encourage you to use these guidelines and tools in your ongoing preparedness efforts.

This information toolkit includes many helpful materials:

- Frequently Asked Questions
- A Summary of the PDPH Pandemic Preparedness Plan
- Influenza Pandemic Phases and Strategic Actions for Businesses
- Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist for Businesses
- Educational Posters and Risk Communication for Businesses

For questions, please contact the  
PDPH Division of Disease Control at 517-685-6740.

# Pandemic Influenza Planning for Businesses

## Frequently Asked Questions



The following information provides answers to the most frequently asked questions about avian influenza and a potential a pandemic. More information is also at [www.phila.gov/health](http://www.phila.gov/health).

### **What is avian influenza?**

- Avian influenza (bird flu) is an infection caused by viruses that occur naturally among birds.
- Wild birds worldwide carry the viruses in their intestines, but usually do not get sick from them. However, avian influenza is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks and turkeys, very sick.
- One type of avian influenza, strain H5N1, can sometimes also infect other animals and people.
- Since the 1990s, avian influenza outbreaks have occurred in Asia, Europe and Africa among birds. As of today, the H5N1 avian influenza strain has not been found in birds or people in the United States.

### **What is pandemic influenza?**

- Pandemic influenza is a global outbreak caused by a new influenza virus.
- The virus will spread easily, possibly causing serious illness and death.

### **How is pandemic influenza different from seasonal influenza (flu)?**

- Seasonal outbreaks of the flu are caused by viruses that are already among people. A pandemic is caused by an influenza virus that is new to people.
- Most people will have little or no immunity to a new influenza virus.
- An influenza pandemic is likely to be more severe than seasonal flu; many more people would be affected.
- Pandemic influenza could affect a broader set of the population, including young adults.
- A severe pandemic could change daily life for a time, including limitations on travel and public gatherings.

### **Why is there concern about the H5N1 avian influenza outbreaks in Asia and other countries?**

- The highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza virus has been transmitted from birds to a few species of mammals, and in some circumstances, to humans.
- Although most humans who were infected with the H5N1 avian influenza virus had close contact with infected birds, a few cases of probable person-to-person transmission have been reported.
- Among humans infected with the H5N1 avian influenza virus, many have developed serious illness and approximately 50% have died.
- Scientists are monitoring the H5N1 avian influenza strain because of its potential to change into pandemic influenza among people.

# Pandemic Influenza Planning for Businesses

## Frequently Asked Questions



### **When will the next pandemic occur?**

- It is difficult to predict when the next pandemic will occur and how severe it will be.
- Influenza viruses are always changing and occasionally a new virus emerges that can spread easily among humans.
- Right now, avian influenza does not spread from person to person easily and could not cause a pandemic. However, scientists are concerned that the H5N1 bird flu in Asia could change and cause a pandemic.
- It is important to know that influenza pandemics have occurred throughout history. There were three pandemics in the last century.

### **What effect would an influenza pandemic have on our communities?**

- As in other emergencies, an influenza pandemic could significantly impact daily life.
- Many people could become sick at the same time and be unable to go to work. This would impact how businesses operate. Also, the large number of sick people could also overwhelm hospitals.
- Many people would need to stay home to help care for sick family members.
- Schools and businesses might need to close to help limit the spread of disease.
- Travel and large group gatherings may be limited during an influenza pandemic to help control the outbreak.

### **What is being done to prepare for an outbreak of pandemic influenza?**

- The World Health Organization, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and countries throughout the world are building on existing disease outbreak plans, including those developed for SARS.
- A coordinated international effort is underway to develop vaccines and improve the detection and tracking of influenza viruses.
- The Philadelphia Department of Public Health is working aggressively and partnering with other city agencies to become prepared for a potential influenza pandemic. PDPH is developing infection control strategies, enhancing surveillance, scaling up laboratory capacity, coordinating with hospitals, working with the Pennsylvania State Department of Health, and taking many other steps towards preparedness.

### **What should Philadelphians do to prepare for an outbreak of pandemic influenza?**

- Stay informed about prevention and infection control actions.
- Take common-sense actions to keep from spreading germs: Cover your coughs and sneezes. Wash hands frequently with soap and water. Stay away from people who are sick. If you are sick, stay away from others as much as possible.
- Preparing now can limit the effects of pandemic influenza. Philadelphians should stay informed and prepare as they would for any emergency.

# The Philadelphia Department of Public Health Pandemic Influenza Preparedness



The Philadelphia Department of Public Health has been working to develop a comprehensive plan to prepare for and respond to a potential influenza pandemic. Although many aspects are already in place, planning is an ongoing process. PDPH is launching initiatives with city agencies, hospitals, businesses, community organizations and citizens to become better prepared for an influenza pandemic and other public health emergencies.

The plan is evolving as new information about a potential influenza pandemic becomes available. The City of Philadelphia Pandemic Preparedness Plan is posted online at [www.phila.gov/health](http://www.phila.gov/health).

PDPH's guidance for pandemic influenza is organized into five main actions to ensure that disease is detected early and that interventions are rapidly put into place to limit the spread of the disease. In particular, PDPH places an emphasis on ensuring special population groups are included in the plan.

The PDPH action items and guidance for pandemic influenza are summarized below.

## **ACTION ONE**

Enhance disease surveillance to ensure early detection of the first cases of pandemic influenza in Philadelphia.

## **ACTION TWO**

Distribute public stocks of antiviral drugs and vaccines and provide local physicians and hospital administrators with updated guidance on clinical management and infection control.

## **ACTION THREE**

Prevent local disease transmission using a range of containment strategies.

## **ACTION FOUR**

Provide ongoing communication with the public (about the response effort, including the purpose and duration of containment measures).

## **ACTION FIVE**

Provide psychological and social support services to emergency field workers and other responders.

# Stopping the Spread of Germs at Work

## INFLUENZA (FLU)



### How Germs Spread

Illnesses like the flu (influenza) and colds are caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. The flu and colds usually spread from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Sometimes germs also can be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets from another person on a surface like a desk, doorknob or handrail and then touches his or her own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands.

### How to Help Stop the Spread of Germs

Take care to:

- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough
- Clean your hands often
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- Stay home when you are sick and check with a health care provider when needed
- Practice other good health habits.

### Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough

**Cough or sneeze into a tissue and then throw it away.** Cover your cough or sneeze with your hands if you do not have a tissue. Then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.

### Clean your hands often

**When available, wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- then rub your hands vigorously together and scrub all surfaces.** Wash for 15 to 20 seconds. It is the soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove germs.

**When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used.** You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using a gel, rub the gel in your hands until they are dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in the gel kills germs that cause colds and the flu.

### Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth

**Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth.** Germs can live for a long time (some can live for 2 hours or more) on surfaces like doorknobs, desks, and tables.

## **Stay home when you are sick and check with a health care provider when needed**

**When you are sick or have flu symptoms, stay home, get plenty of rest, and check with a health care provider as needed.** Remember: Keeping your distance from others may protect them from getting sick.

Common symptoms of the flu include:

- fever (usually high, greater than 101 degrees Fahrenheit)
- headache
- extreme tiredness
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle aches, and
- nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, (much more common among children than adults).

## **Practice other good health habits**

**Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.** Practicing healthy habits will help you stay healthy during flu season and all year long.

## **More Facts, Figures and How-To Ideas**

CDC and its partner agencies and organizations offer a great deal of information about hand washing and other things you can do to stay healthy and avoid the germs that cause flu, the common cold, and other illnesses. See other resources and posters on the Stop the Spread of Germs site for a select listing of Web sites, materials, and contact information. [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)