



# Hazard #3 Pandemic Flu



**Seasonal Flu** is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a **flu vaccination** each year and using good hand washing technique. October or November is the best time to receive the vaccine as this gives the body time to build up defenses against the viruses.

**Avian Flu** (Bird Flu) is an infection caused by avian influenza viruses, also called H5N1 and occurs naturally among birds. This is not the same as pandemic flu, but is a virus that affects wild birds and farm birds. Usually, bird flu does not spread easily to other animals or to people, but infections with this strain have occurred in humans. The U.S. restricts the import of birds or bird products from certain areas at high risk of avian flu.

**H1N1 Flu** is a novel influenza virus of swine origin that was first detected in April 2009. This virus is thought to be spread in the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread; mainly through people who are sick with the virus and cough and sneeze exposing others.

• **Pandemic Flu** is a global disease outbreak and occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which people have little or no immunity and for which there is no vaccine. The most reliable source of information on pandemic flu is public health authorities and the government Web site at [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov). If a flu pandemic develops, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention will give "the outbreak" an official rating on a scale of 1 to 6 (similar to the hurricane category rating system)

o **Category 1** indicates the least severe geographic pandemic

o **Category 6** indicates the most severe geographic pandemic



## How to Prevent the Flu

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against 2009 H1N1 virus. However, a 2009 H1N1 vaccine is currently in production and may be ready for the public in the fall. As always, a vaccine will be available to protect against **seasonal influenza**. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza:

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.

Use antibacterial hand sanitizer if a sink with running water is unavailable.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Cover your mouth / nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or cough into your sleeve)

Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick.

If symptomatic (fever of 100 degrees with cough or sore throat) stay home for at least 24 hours after the fever is gone (**without the use of fever reducing medications**)

## Know How the Flu Spreads

• Human flu germs spread easily, especially through coughs and sneezes, as droplets can spray through the air and into the mouth or nose of people nearby or onto surfaces or things that people touch before touching their nose, mouth or eyes.

• People with the flu can leave the flu virus on objects they touch if the germs are on their hands (for example, right after using a tissue or rubbing their nose). Objects may include:

- o Doorknobs
- o Faucets
- o Switches
- o Telephones
- o Tables
- o Keyboards



- Flu germs may also spread through close contact between people or sharing personal items such as utensils, cups or straws, towels, washcloths or lip balm.
- **A person who has the flu can infect others even before feeling sick from one day before symptoms start and up to 5 days after developing symptoms.**

## Cold Symptoms

**Develop gradually**; stuffy or runny nose, sore throat, cough, sneezing and rarely causes high fever, severe headaches or extreme exhaustion.

## Flu Symptoms

**Develop very suddenly and may become severe**; fever 101° F or higher, chills, headache, tiredness and weakness, dry hacking cough, stuffy or runny nose, sore throat, chest discomfort, muscle and body aches, eye irritation, diarrhea and vomiting (more common in children).

If you have any illness within 10 days of returning home from traveling abroad, call your health care professional and describe your trip and symptoms.



## Be Ready if the Flu Comes Your Way

- Follow proper hand-washing steps:
  - o Lather both hands with soap and scrub for at least 20 seconds.
  - o Rinse thoroughly and dry hands on a clean towel, while using the towel to turn off the faucet, if possible.
  - o Use antibacterial hand sanitizer if a sink with running water is unavailable.
- Disinfect objects and areas that are frequently touched.
- o Clean bathrooms and frequently touched surfaces more often, daily if possible.
- Follow Universal Precautions if you come in contact with bodily fluids and wash hands directly afterwards.
- Encourage individuals with cold symptoms to follow cough and sneeze etiquette: cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue and wash your hands right away afterward. When caring for individuals with the flu, have them throw away used tissues right away and provide a bag for disposal next to the bed.
- Wash dishes in a dishwasher or use hot water and soap to help kill the germs.
- In communities hit by the flu, health care visits may be difficult to schedule. Unless you are at high risk for flu complications or are experiencing very severe symptoms, try to recover at home. During a flu pandemic consider using a medical face mask if you can't avoid being in a crowded setting.

## When to Call for Medical Help during Flu Season

Employees must follow the Medical Policy related to **"Guidelines for Contacting the Delegating Nurse"** for changes in a client's medical condition.

If an individual has a productive cough with mucus that is thick, yellow-green, or has visible blood in it. If an individual develops new symptoms after about 5 days.

If an individual has any symptoms that seem very severe.

If an individual displays signs of dehydration (increased thirst, dry or sticky mouth, no tears, little or no urination for 8 or more hours).

If an individual is vomiting that is severe or lasts longer than 24 hours.

If the individual is not getting better after about a week or two.