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## **Pandemic Flu: Know the Facts**

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Influenza, often called the flu, is a contagious respiratory disease caused by influenza viruses. In the United States, the flu is an annual event that begins in December and ends in March. This type of flu is called the **seasonal flu**. Rarely, a new type of flu virus may appear that people have not been exposed to before, so they have no natural resistance to it. This type of virus could cause a flu that is more serious than a seasonal or “typical” flu. This type of flu spreads easily from person-to-person around the world in a very short time and causes serious illness and deaths. This flu is called the **pandemic flu**.

Currently, experts have discovered a new type of flu virus that has infected and killed many birds. This virus causes a flu called **avian or bird flu**. In Asia and Turkey infected birds (domesticated chickens, ducks and turkeys) have transmitted the bird flu to humans causing illness and sometimes death. Although there has been no sustained human-to-human transmission, there has been growing concern that a flu pandemic could occur. Unlike the seasonal flu, pandemic flu infects large numbers of people of all ages causing serious illness and deaths. Whether or not a flu pandemic actually occurs, you can prepare by knowing the facts about the flu and how to respond to it.

The symptoms of the bird flu, which are similar to those of the seasonal flu, are:

- Fever and chills
- Extreme tiredness
- Headache
- Muscle aches and pains
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea (more common in children)

Contact your health care provider if you have any questions about your specific symptoms.

You can take action to prevent the spread of germs and make good hygiene a habit.

- Wash your hands with soap and water or clean them with a hand sanitizer.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and clean your hands afterwards. Use soap and water or a hand sanitizer.
- Stay home if you are sick. Get plenty of rest and drink a lot of fluids.
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick.
- Keeping your living and work areas clean.

During a flu pandemic, public health officials may impose community-level restrictions to prevent the flu virus from spreading. You may be asked to stay home for an extended period of time even though you are not sick. Schools, workplaces and places of worship

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may be closed temporarily and mass transportation such as subways, trains and air travel may be limited.

You can prepare for a flu pandemic now. These actions may lessen the impact of a flu pandemic on you and your family:

- Store extra supplies of water and food.
- Ask your doctor and insurance company if you can get an extra supply of your regular prescription drugs.
- Store a supply of any nonprescription drugs such as pain relievers, cough and cold medicines, stomach remedies, fluids with electrolytes and vitamins.
- Store health supplies such as bleach, tissues, a thermometer, disposable gloves, soap and alcohol based hand cleaners.
- Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got sick.

**For more information, visit [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org), [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov), [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov), and [www.who.int](http://www.who.int).**

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