



Facts About Flu, Pandemic Flu, and Bird Flu

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What is the flu and how is it spread?

• **What is the flu?** Influenza, also called the flu, is a disease caused by the influenza virus. Each year about 5% to 20% of people in the US get the flu. People with the flu may have a headache, a fever, a dry cough, a sore throat, a runny/stuffy nose, extreme tiredness, and muscle aches. Children may also have nausea,

vomiting, and diarrhea. Most people will feel very sick when they have the flu, but will get better on their own. Some people are at risk for serious flu complications, such as pneumonia.

- **How is the flu spread?** The flu virus is spread by droplets that get into the air when someone with the flu

coughs or sneezes. A person can get the flu by breathing in these droplets. A person can also get the flu by touching his or her eyes, nose, or mouth after touching a surface that has the flu virus on it. A person with the flu can give the flu to other people even before he or she has symptoms of the flu.

How do I keep from getting the flu and spreading it to others?

• **How do I keep from getting the flu?** The best way to prevent the flu is to get the flu vaccine each fall. The flu vaccine is especially recommended to people at risk for flu complications. People at risk include those over 50 years old; children 6 to 23 months old; pregnant women; people with certain health conditions (such as

heart, lung, kidney, or metabolic diseases, asthma, anemia, seizure disorders, or a weakened immune system) and; people who work or live with someone at risk for complications. The flu virus can change from year to year. That is one reason why you need to get a flu vaccine every year. Another important, and easy,

way to protect yourself from the flu is to wash your hands often. Always wash your hands before and after touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Especially, wash your hands before eating. Stay away from people who have the flu. Finally, to stay healthy, eat right, exercise, and get enough sleep.

What is the best way to wash your hands?

- First, wet your hands and apply soap. (If you use a bar of soap, make sure it is clean, and keep it on a rack so that it dries between uses.)
- Next, rub your hands together and make sure to scrub all parts of your hands and fingers. Do this for 10 - 15 seconds (about as long as it takes to hum a short tune such as 'Happy Birthday' twice).
- Rinse all of the soap off your hands and dry them well.
- If you don't have soap and clean water, use one of the alcohol-based gels (hand sanitizers) to clean your hands. When using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:
 - Apply the gel to the palm of one hand.
 - Rub the gel over all surfaces of your hands and fingers until they are dry.

• **How can I keep from spreading the flu to others?** Washing your hands often, helps to prevent spreading the flu to others. Another way to prevent

spreading the flu is to cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then put the tissue in the trash. If you don't have a tissue, cover your

mouth and nose with your upper arm. Wash your hands after you cough or sneeze. You should also stay home when you are sick.

What is pandemic flu and how can it be prevented?

• **What is pandemic flu (also called pandemic influenza)?** Pandemic flu is a flu outbreak that occurs when the flu is caused by a virus that spreads very easily from one person to another, and can make most people seriously ill. Flu pandemics occurred in 1918, 1957 and 1968. These pandemics caused illness and death all over the world. It is likely that a flu pandemic will happen again in

the future, but we don't know when.

• **What can be done to prevent the spread of pandemic flu when it occurs?** The good health habits that will protect against the flu should also help against pandemic flu. (See box below) You should also consider getting the flu vaccine each year and discuss this option with your doctor. A vaccine is unlikely to be

available immediately since it takes up to 6 months to develop a vaccine against a new strain of flu virus. Countries around the world are storing medicines that may be able to prevent and treat pandemic flu. In the U.S., national, state and local pandemic influenza preparedness plans are being developed.

You can protect yourself, your family, and your community from the flu by:

- Getting a flu vaccine, if it is available to you.
- Practicing good health habits:
 - Wash your hands often.
 - Cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
 - Stay at home when you are sick.
 - Avoid close contact with people who have the flu.
 - Eat right, exercise regularly, and get enough sleep.

What is bird flu and how can it be prevented?

• **What is bird flu (also called avian influenza)?** Animals can get the flu as well as humans. Right now, there is an outbreak of flu in some wild and domestic birds (chickens, ducks and geese). This outbreak is called bird flu. Some people who have had close contact with sick birds have become sick with bird flu, but the bird flu does not easily spread from one person to another.

Cases of bird flu have not yet been documented in birds in the United States. However, birds in the USA may become infected in the future.

• **Why are people worried about bird flu?** We are concerned that the bird flu virus could change to one that can cause pandemic flu. No one knows how likely this is to happen.

• **What can I do to protect against bird flu?** If you are in an area where there are infected birds, you should avoid contact with the birds. Be sure to wash your hands well if you come into contact with birds or surfaces that birds have touched. Make sure that chicken and eggs are cooked completely before eating them.

For more information on flu, bird flu and pandemic flu go to <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>
<http://pandemicflu.gov>



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