

# Pandemic Influenza Preparedness & Response



## Top 10 Tips for Pandemic Preparedness and Prevention

Public health organizations throughout the world are engaged in an unprecedented effort to prepare for a possible influenza pandemic. But there are important steps you can take as well. The guidelines below will help you significantly reduce the spread of disease and better prepare you, your family and staff both before and during a pandemic, should one occur.

### 1. Use effective hand washing techniques.

- Wet your hands with warm running water. Add soap, and then rub your hands together away from the running water, making a soapy lather. Do this for **at least 15 seconds**, washing the front and back of your hands, as well as between your fingers and under your nails.
- Rinse your hands thoroughly under warm running water. Use a paper towel to turn off the water, and remember to dispose of it in a proper receptacle.
- Dry hands thoroughly with a clean towel, preferably paper. Any kind of towel previously used by you or others may look clean, but consider it to be contaminated.
- Supervise a child to ensure that they wash hands properly.
- Keep nails trimmed and clean. Long fingernails and artificial nails are very difficult to disinfect.

### 2. Use an alcohol-based hand disinfectant, if clean water isn't available.

- Check the product to ensure it contains at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Alcohol-based disinfectants do not kill germs on dirty hands. If possible, wash your hands with soap and warm water, even if the water is not fit to drink. In the absence of water, do your best to wipe or clean your hands before using the disinfectant wash.
- Make sure your hands are as dry as possible before using the alcohol-based wash to avoid dilution of the alcohol solution, which reduces effectiveness.
- Apply enough disinfectant to cover all areas of your hands, including under your nails. Rub hands together to evenly distribute the disinfectant product. Keep rubbing hands for at least 15 seconds – or until your hands feel dry.
- Children can use alcohol-based hand disinfectants but young children must be supervised to ensure they do not rub the product into the mouth or eyes while their hands are still moist. Once the product has dried on the hands, it becomes non-toxic.

### 3. Keep unwashed hands away from your face.

- Cold and flu germs typically enter the body through the eyes, nose, or mouth. This can happen when contaminated hands touch the eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Germs contaminate doorknobs, railings, computer keyboards, telephones, steering wheels, elevator buttons, and almost any surface regularly touched by hands, or where droplets from a cough or sneeze can land. You can't avoid getting germs on your hands, but you *can* avoid transferring them to your face.
- Take notice of how often you touch your face, rub your eyes, or place your fingers in your mouth. Learning to become aware of these habits is the first step to changing them.
- If you care for children, be especially careful. Since they can't be expected to practice adult level hygiene, you'll need to be more diligent of infection control practices around them.

### 4. Cover your coughs and sneezes to protect others from your germs.

- Coughing and sneezing spreads germs in the form of droplets that settle on objects and airborne particles that remain suspended in the air and can be inhaled by those around you.

- To reduce the spread of germs, always cough or sneeze into a tissue – even your upper sleeve if necessary. Immediately dispose of soiled tissue in a wastebasket.
- If you've been coughing or sneezing, wash hands frequently to help avoid contaminating items you touch.
- A disposable mask can help contain coughs and sneezes. Don't re-use masks and dispose of them in a wastebasket when you remove them.

#### 5. Understand how “social distancing” slows the spread of many germs.

- During a pandemic, common friendly gestures, such as hand-shaking, cheek-kissing, and other face-to-face social customs should be modified using *Social Distancing*. Social distancing is the practice of maintaining a distance from others of at least three feet in order to isolate oneself from disease. Social distancing goes beyond keeping away from those who are obviously sick. It recognizes that germs are easily spread by people who exhibit no symptoms at all.
- Social distancing also involves taking positive steps to avoid placing yourself in close proximity to crowds. For example, avoid elevators by using stairs, stay away from crowded stores, shop by internet if possible – or at minimum, shop during low-peak hours when stores are less likely to be crowded.
- Do not share eating utensils, drinking glasses, towels, or other personal items.
- Refrain from spitting (pandemic or not).

#### 6. Improve your daily health habits.

- Lung and breathing problems, such as asthma, should be kept under the best control possible.
- Quit smoking.
- Get adequate rest, exercise, and eat properly to boost your immune system.
- Get a flu shot.

#### 7. Consider your mental health.

- If you are stressed or having trouble coping before a pandemic, the expected social and economic disruption will really challenge you. Consult with the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). It's only a phone call away.
- Fear of the unknown can be very stressful. Get the facts about pandemic flu. If you've read this far, you know that you are not powerless. You can take positive steps to avoid infection. Don't put off preparing. Remember, if a flu pandemic occurs, it could progress rapidly.

#### 8. Have a plan and stock emergency supplies as part of your preparation.

- Have a plan to deal with how a pandemic could affect you and those you are close to. Pandemic flu checklists for individuals and families are readily available and include advice on recommended supplies to have on hand. Go to <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/tab3.html#checklist> for a variety of checklists for you and your family. Where you live, the size of your family, and any special health concerns will determine what supplies and prescription medicines you'll need to have available.
- A rule of thumb is that if any item or service is essential to you, consider how you'll get it during a pandemic when supplies may become limited or stores may be closed.

#### 9. Develop connections within your communities.

- Cohesive communities are a lifeline during stressful times. Your neighbors, social and church groups, schools, and businesses will all be affected during a pandemic. Volunteer your assistance because you may find you'll need theirs.
- Children, the disabled, and the elderly in your community have special needs and will be most severely affected. Your local community will need plans to address these special populations. Get involved.

#### 10. Stay informed.

- Check the Department of Health and Human Services' pandemic flu website <http://pandemicflu.gov/> regularly so that you can stay informed about the latest information.
- Be flexible. Because an influenza virus has the ability to rapidly mutate, it is difficult to predict how fast it will eventually spread or how well vaccines (if available) or antivirals will work. This makes preparing for some aspects an influenza pandemic inexact at best. So expect the unexpected and assume an attitude that allows you to adapt to a fluid environment.