

Now is the time to prepare.

Your Guide to Pandemic Flu Care in the Home



Why should I think about an influenza pandemic now?

The current strain of bird flu could lead to a pandemic flu outbreak. Influenza pandemics happen more often than you may realize. Since 1889, the United States has experienced four pandemics, with the last one occurring in 1968. Infectious disease experts believe that a pandemic flu is highly likely to occur sometime in the next few years...unfortunately, we don't know when it could happen. That's why it's important for us to learn more about it and to prepare now to protect ourselves and our families.

How bad could it really be in Howard County during an influenza pandemic?

Some pandemics can be more severe than others. A severe pandemic, like in 1918, could lead to 10,000 additional hospitalizations and 1,700 deaths in Howard County alone. The important thing to remember is that a pandemic may overwhelm hospitals, doctors' offices and clinics.

How will this guide help?

This guide will give you tips on how to care for someone who has the flu. These tips are useful if you are caring for someone with regular flu or someone affected by pandemic flu.

What is the difference between seasonal and pandemic flu?

Every winter, SEASONAL FLU circulates in our community with varying severity. Public health officials track the virus strains of flu each year and use this information to develop vaccines to help decrease the number and the severity of seasonal flu cases. A PANDEMIC FLU is defined as a new strain of flu that circulates worldwide and affects large numbers of people. There is typically no vaccine immediately available to protect against a pandemic strain of flu. Because no one has had this new strain, large numbers of people nationwide can become sick at the same time.

You may want to stock these items to help you care for people with the flu:

General care-giving supplies:

- Thermometers (digital thermometers or thermometers without mercury are best)
- Soap
- Box of disposable gloves
- Paper towels
- Tissues
- Surgical or dust masks
- Sugar and salt

Over-the-counter medications*:

- Acetaminophen
- Ibuprofen
- Cough syrup
- Electrolyte drinks such as Pedialyte® or Gatorade®
- Vitamins
- Anti-diarrheal products
- Cough/sore throat lozenges

Disinfection supplies:

- Bleach
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer (Purell® or other brand)
- Disinfectant spray or wipes such as Clorox®

* To avoid interactions with prescription medications or overdosing young children—check with your doctor in advance as to which medicines and what dosage you should use for each household member.

What should I do to prepare for a flu pandemic?

Plan now. Figure out what you will do if members of your household have to stay home from work or school or stay separated from others

for a period of up to two weeks. Keep extra supplies of food, water, and medications, and prepare your disaster supply kit to have on hand. For information on what to include in a disaster supply kit, visit the Howard County Health Department at www.hchealth.org and click on "Emergency Preparedness." Also, consider what to do to care for pets and the elderly/disabled in your family.

How can I recognize flu from other illnesses?

Flu symptoms are much worse than those of a cold or other respiratory illness. Fever and body aches are very pronounced and are often accompanied by shivering "chills" and cough. Severe headache and sore throat are common. A runny nose and other cold symptoms may also be present. Gastrointestinal symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, are uncommon in adults yet occasionally occur among children. People who have the flu feel really sick, and may be so weak that they have a hard time getting out of bed without help.

How can I decrease the risk of getting or spreading the flu?

The flu virus is spread when contaminated droplets exit the mouth and nose of an infected person and come in contact with others. In the event of a pandemic, you should be prepared to stay home from work or school if family members are ill in order to decrease the risk of spreading the virus. This advice is important because you can spread the virus to others before your symptoms begin.

- Wash your hands often.
- Periodically wipe counters, railings, doorknobs, switches, telephones, toys and other surfaces that are commonly touched with a disinfectant.



HAND WASHING

Frequent and consistent hand washing has been shown as the MOST effective practice to reduce the spread of flu or any virus! Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or about the same amount of time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice. Wash your hands before and after caring for someone with the flu and use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer such as Purell®.

Isopropyl alcohol (rubbing alcohol) can be used as an alternative. Allow surfaces to air dry.

- Avoid touching your hands to your face, particularly when you are in contact with frequently touched items in public areas.
- Turn your face away when others cough or sneeze near you.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Clean your hands afterward. Put used tissues in a wastebasket.
- Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue.
- Consider wearing a surgical or dust mask if you have flu symptoms to reduce the risk of spreading contaminated droplets from coughing or sneezing. Do NOT use a mask if this makes it more difficult to breathe or otherwise produces significant discomfort.
- Wearing a mask as you provide care for the ill may provide a small level of protection and comfort though it will not completely protect you from getting the flu.
- Try to keep patients in one room or one part of your home, and away from others who are not sick.
- Avoid being in the same room with patients if you are well and not directly providing care for the ill.

YOU CAN MAKE YOUR OWN DISINFECTANT

Mix 1 gallon water with 1/4 cup of bleach. Label the container and mix a fresh batch every time you use it.

- Wear disposable gloves when in contact with or cleaning up body fluids, including vomit.
- Keep everyone's personal items separate. Avoid sharing computers, pens, towels, clothes, sheets, pillows, blankets, food or eating utensils.
- It is okay to wash everyone's clothes and dishes together. Use detergent and hot water.

What do I need to know to care for a loved one at home in the event of pandemic flu?

There is no cure for the pandemic flu. Though medications like oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and zanamivir (Relenza®) may reduce severity and shorten the duration of illness, it is likely that these drugs will be in very short supply or unavailable during a pandemic. The key is to follow a few basic principles and try to relieve some of the symptoms of influenza.

Basic principles to follow when caring for someone with the flu:

- The most important thing you can do is to provide plenty of fluids. Avoid alcohol and beverages with caffeine, as these tend to dehydrate people.
- Keep the patient clean, dry and warm and isolated from others in the house.
- Provide a comfortable place to rest and sleep.
- Provide reassurance to your family member that you will be there to take care of them.

Relieving fever, aches, chills, sore throat and headache:

- Take the patient's temperature in the morning and evening and keep a record.
- Give fever-reducing medications such as acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g., Advil®, Motrin® or other). Aspirin may be used but must be avoided in anyone under age 20.
- Consider a lukewarm water sponge bath or tub bath to help reduce fever and increase comfort.

- Encourage gargling with warm salt water or using throat lozenges to help reduce throat pain and discomfort.
- Offer ice cream, sherbet, popsicles or sorbets to ease sore throat pain in children too young to gargle or use lozenges.

Relieving cough and respiratory symptoms:

- Fluids may help keep secretions thinner and easier to cough up. Steam from warm beverages may help ease congestion.
- Help the patient to change positions in bed and, if tolerated, get out of bed to sit in a chair or take brief walks around the room every 2–3 hours during the day to avoid chest congestion and pneumonia.
- Have the patient take 4–5 slow, deep breaths and try to cough every 2–3 hours during the day to promote lung expansion and clearing of phlegm.
- Elevate the patient's head and upper body up to a 45 degree angle as this may ease breathing.
- Provide cough syrup or lozenges to help increase comfort.

YOU CAN MAKE YOUR OWN ELECTROLYTE DRINK

- 1 quart or liter of water
 - 1/2 tsp. of table salt (level)
 - 2 Tbs. of sugar (level)—do not use artificial sweeteners
- Mix well until sugar is dissolved. Solution may be served at room temperature but do not boil.

- Use a room humidifier and/or have the patient spend time in a steamy bathroom to promote comfort and ease of breathing.

Relieving nausea, vomiting and diarrhea:

- Offer a clear liquid diet to promote nutrition and hydration while reducing cramping and discomfort. A clear liquid diet includes water, clear broths, Jello®, ginger ale, Sprite®, decaffeinated tea or caffeine free cola.
- Give small sips of fluids that contain electrolytes when vomiting and diarrhea are present.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION AND CURRENT ACTIONS

The following sources were used to develop the recommendations in this guide and they contain additional information on planning for a pandemic. In the event of a pandemic, these sites will contain updated information.

To hear local announcements in the event of a pandemic flu, call the Howard County Health Department's Flu Hotline at 410-313-6503.

Web sites:

- www.pandemicflu.gov
- www.flu.maryland.gov
- www.hchealth.gov
- www.cdc.gov
- www.redcross.org

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Examples are Pedialyte® for children, or Gatorade® and Powerade® for adults (sports drinks should be avoided in young children as these solutions contain too much sugar and not enough electrolytes.)

- Offer other mild, non-spicy foods once diarrhea has stopped and if well tolerated by a patient with nausea and vomiting. Good choices include white toast (no butter), rice, cream of wheat, crackers, and potatoes (no skin). Once the patient further improves, add canned fruit (e.g., applesauce, bananas), chicken noodle soup, poached or boiled eggs, and baked chicken breast (no skin) or other baked meats or fish.
- Give fluids in small but frequent sips (or use ice chips) if nausea and vomiting are present and avoid acidic drinks (such as citrus or cranberry juices) as this may further increase stomach discomfort.
- Watch closely for signs of dehydration including dry-looking lips or mouth and decreased amounts of urine which may appear darker than normal. Infants will have a decrease in the number of wet diapers.

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When should I call the doctor?

During an influenza pandemic, hospitals and doctors' offices may be overwhelmed with patients. If you think the patient should see a doctor, call your health care professional. Visit Howard County General Hospital's Web site: www.hcgh.org or the Howard County Health Department Web site www.hchealth.org during a pandemic for more advice and instructions.

In general, flu patients should be seen by a health care provider when the patient has any of the following symptoms:

- Confusion or extreme irritability
- Difficult breathing or chest pain with each breath
- A cough producing frothy or red saliva
- Bluish skin
- Stiff neck
- Inability to move arm or leg
- First-time seizure

You should contact your health care provider when patients have a high or worrisome fever. Guidelines for fever are:

- Infants under 3 months—a fever of 100.4° or above taken rectally
- Children from 3 months to 2 years—a fever of 103° or above
- Children over 2 years to adults—a fever of 104° or above

Keep Your Guide in a Convenient Place