

What is the difference between the levels of pandemic alert?

The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified 6 phases of pandemic alert to help with planning and response should there be a pandemic.

Phase 1: no flu viruses circulating among animals have been reported to cause infections in humans.

Phase 2: an animal influenza virus circulating among domesticated or wild animals is known to have caused infection in humans, and is therefore considered a potential pandemic threat.

Phase 3: an animal or human-animal “mixed” influenza virus has caused sporadic cases or small clusters of disease in people, but has not resulted in human-to-human transmission sufficient to cause community outbreaks.

Phase 4: human-to-human transmission of an animal or human-animal “mixed” influenza virus able to cause “community-level outbreaks.” Phase 4 indicates a significant increase in risk of a pandemic but does not necessarily mean that a pandemic is a forgone conclusion.

Phase 5: human-to-human spread of the virus into at least two countries in one WHO region. While most countries will not be affected at this stage, the declaration of Phase 5 is a strong signal that a pandemic is imminent and that the time to finalize the organization, communication, and implementation of the planned mitigation measures is short.

Phase 6: the pandemic phase is characterized by community level outbreaks in at least one other country in a different WHO region, in addition to the criteria defined in Phase 5. Designation of this phase will indicate that a global pandemic is under way.



What can I do to stay healthy?

Here are some practical tips for staying healthy that you should follow every day, and they are especially important during the flu season, widespread flu outbreaks or if there is a pandemic.

1. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
2. If you become ill with flu-like symptoms, contact your health care provider who will determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed.
3. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and dispose of the tissue in the trash. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve and not your hands.
4. If you get sick, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
5. Avoid close contact with anyone who appears to have the flu.

Contacts

By Email:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:
www.pandemicflu.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
www.cdc.gov/flu

World Health Organization:
www.who.int

FMI:
www.fmi.org

By Phone:

1-800-CDC-INFO • (1-800-232-4636) • (1-888-232-6348 for TTY)

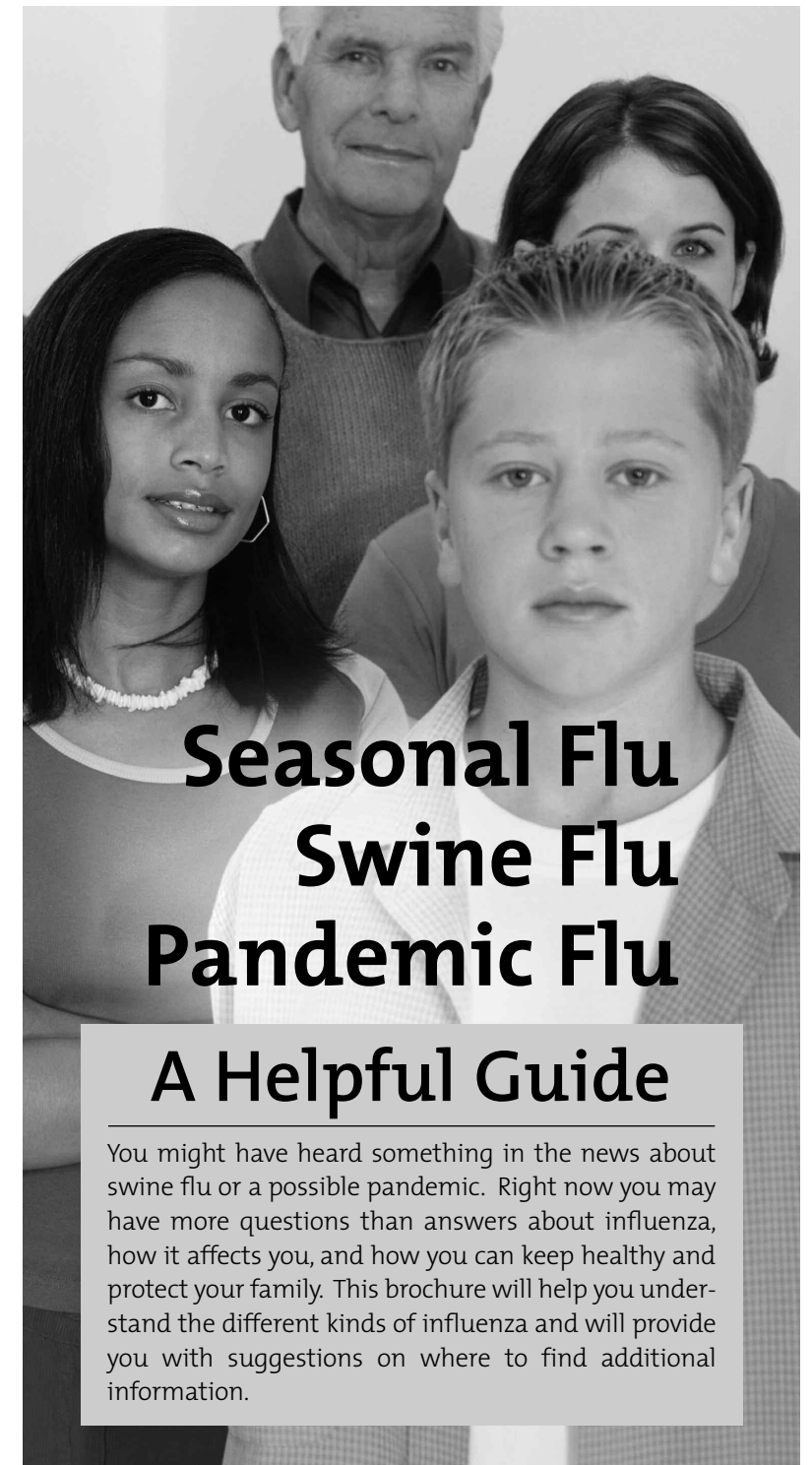


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Seasonal Flu Swine Flu Pandemic Flu

A Helpful Guide

You might have heard something in the news about swine flu or a possible pandemic. Right now you may have more questions than answers about influenza, how it affects you, and how you can keep healthy and protect your family. This brochure will help you understand the different kinds of influenza and will provide you with suggestions on where to find additional information.

Seasonal Influenza or Common Flu

Influenza, commonly called the flu, is caused by a virus. Every year there is a flu season, usually in the fall and winter. In the United States, an average of 5 to 20 percent of the population gets the flu and 36,000 people die from flu-related causes every year.

What is the flu?

The flu is a contagious respiratory disease. Illness can be mild to severe. Symptoms include fever, runny nose, sneezing, coughing, sore throat and muscle aches.

Who can get the flu?

Anyone can get the flu. It does not usually cause serious illness in healthy adults. For the very young, the elderly and those who are already sick, the flu may cause complications and result in more serious illness. One of the most common complications is pneumonia.

How do people get the flu?

The flu virus is most commonly spread from person to person through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Then the virus particles can be inhaled through the nose or mouth of another person. The virus particles may also be transmitted to a surface when a person coughs or sneezes. People may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their nose or mouth. The flu virus can only survive outside the body for about two hours.

Can the flu be prevented?

Flu vaccinations are offered every year. Most people who want to reduce their chances of getting the common flu can get vaccinated. The vaccine helps prevent seasonal flu but it does not provide protection against all types of flu. Common sense precautions such as washing your hands and sneezing into a tissue will help prevent the spread of the flu.

Can people get the flu from food?

No. Influenza is a respiratory disease and is not food borne. People cannot get the flu from eating or handling food.

Can people get the flu from animals?

Birds and some animals also get the flu. The viruses that cause flu in animals can infect people, although this is not common. However, flu viruses can change or mutate into new viruses. These new viruses may be able to easily infect people.

Is seasonal flu the same thing as a pandemic?

No. Seasonal flu occurs every year, and there are vaccines available to help protect people from these flu viruses. A pandemic is quite different – see the section on “Pandemic Flu” to understand how these are different.

Swine Influenza or Swine Flu

Like humans, pigs can also get the flu. Swine flu is found in pigs around the world. The symptoms of influenza in pigs are very similar to those in humans. Swine can catch the flu from other pigs, from people and from birds.

What is swine flu?

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs that can cause outbreaks of flu among pigs especially in the fall and winter. People do not normally get swine flu, and when they do, it is usually from direct exposure to pigs. It does not readily pass from human-to-human.

Why are people now getting swine flu?

Influenza viruses change constantly. Pigs can be infected by avian, human and swine viruses. When influenza viruses from different species infect pigs, the viruses can swap genes (“reassort”) and new viruses that are a mix of swine, human and/or avian influenza viruses can emerge. The recent outbreak of swine flu in April 2009 referred to as H1N1, is caused by a new virus containing a mixture of virus genes never seen before. Unlike typical swine flu, the new virus can spread from person-to-person.

How can you tell if you have swine flu?

The symptoms of the common flu are the same as swine flu. Only laboratory tests can determine exactly what virus is causing your flu symptoms.

How does swine flu spread?

The swine flu spreads the same ways as seasonal flu. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person-to-person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Infected people may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to seven or more days after becoming sick.

Can I get swine flu from eating pork?

No. Like the common flu, swine flu is a respiratory disease — it is not a food borne illness. You cannot get swine flu from eating or handling pork or pork products.

I’ve already had my flu shot (vaccine) – am I protected?

This H1N1 swine flu is a new form of virus and the vaccine will not protect you, although the vaccine is still highly recommended since it will help prevent the common flu. If you are infected with this new swine flu virus, there are drugs that are effective in treating the illness.

Pandemic Flu

Pandemic is the term used for any disease that rapidly spreads around the world, affecting large numbers of people and for which there is no natural immunity or immediately available treatment or prevention.

What is pandemic influenza?

Pandemic influenza (pandemic flu) is a worldwide outbreak of respiratory disease caused by a new flu virus that people have not been exposed to before. Because our bodies would have no resistance to this new virus, it could spread quickly from person-to-person and cause serious illness.

What causes pandemic flu viruses?

Flu viruses have the ability to change, and any flu virus can mutate into a new form. These new viruses can infect people, spread rapidly from person-to-person and cause serious illness. The flu vaccines currently used by the medical community will not be effective in preventing this new virus from causing illness. If the illness spreads around the world, a pandemic could result.

How is pandemic flu different from seasonal flu?

The symptoms of pandemic flu are similar to those of seasonal flu, only the illness is usually more severe and can lead to more serious complications. Young people and children are especially sensitive, and no one has strong immunity. Seasonal flu is predictable and can be controlled. Pandemic flu is unpredictable and it is more difficult to control.

Will there be a flu pandemic?

No one can predict when, or if, a flu pandemic might occur. Previous influenza pandemics (such as the ones in 1918, 1957 and 1968) resulted in large numbers of illnesses and death. Many government organizations and businesses are better prepared for a pandemic than in the past. New drugs are available that can prevent and treat influenza. Monitoring and control measures are now managed on a global basis.

Flu Q&A