

Pandemic Influenza and Bird Flu FAQ's

There are no cases of bird flu in Michigan or the United States. We are actively looking for human cases in Michigan and have plans in place to respond, if necessary. It is difficult to predict if the bird flu virus will become a pandemic, but Dickinson-Iron District Health Department is prepared to respond to any public health emergency. The frequently asked questions below provide additional information on the pandemics and the bird flu.

What is the difference between a pandemic and an epidemic?

The main difference is the number of people infected and the area that is hit by a disease. An epidemic affects many people within a population, community or region at the same time. A pandemic affects an exceptionally high number of people in a wide geographic area, such as worldwide.

When will the next pandemic happen?

We do not know when the next influenza pandemic will occur. Historically, influenza pandemics occur three to four times every 100 years.

Why are health officials concerned about the bird flu?

The virus that is circulating in Southeast Asia is a new virus, so people's immune systems may not be prepared to fight this infection, causing more people to become sick than the typical flu season.

Is the bird flu going to cause a pandemic?

The virus in Southeast Asia has **not** mutated to a point where it could easily spread from person-to-person and it's difficult to predict if – or when – that might happen, or if it will result in an influenza pandemic. The people who have gotten the bird flu in Southeast Asia have been in direct contact with infected birds.

How is Michigan preparing for the bird flu?

Michigan has created a pandemic influenza plan that is designed to limit sickness and death during an influenza pandemic. It involves continued surveillance for the virus, infection control methods and assuring sufficient medical services. It also defines the role of state and local government in order to help control the spread of bird flu.

How is Dickinson-Iron District Health Department preparing for the bird flu?

We are developing a pandemic influenza response plan that details local strategies to combat an influenza outbreak. We have been conducting exercises with local and regional emergency response partners to test our ability to dispense vaccine and medication to our county residents.

Is there a vaccine I can get to protect me against bird flu?

Not at this time. The National Institutes of Health is developing a vaccine to protect against the current strain (H5N1) of the bird flu virus. Although this vaccine may not match the final bird flu strain that could infect humans, it may be close enough to provide

some protection and reduce symptoms of the virus until a final version of the vaccine can be created.

What is Tamiflu® and how can it help me?

Tamiflu® is an antiviral medication that is used to reduce the severity of flu symptoms and the amount of time the person is sick. The federal government is working to stockpile antivirals in the event of a bird flu pandemic, which the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will distribute to each state.

Should I buy some Tamiflu®?

It is not recommended to purchase Tamiflu® or any other antiviral medication at this time. Doctors will need antivirals this season to treat people who have the typical influenza virus. Also, if Tamiflu® is used incorrectly, the drug may become less effective against the bird flu, if it were needed.

Should I bother to get the flu vaccine this year since it wouldn't protect me against bird flu?

The bird flu strain that has been detected in Southeast Asia is *not* the same as the typical influenza virus that circulates each year in Michigan. Health officials encourage you to get your flu vaccine to help prevent complications caused by the typical flu, such as pneumonia or hospitalization. To get your influenza vaccine, contact your health care provider, local public health department.

What can I do to protect myself and my family?

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based waterless hand sanitizer.
- Avoid being exposed to people who are sick with flu-like symptoms.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue whenever you cough or sneeze – then throw the tissue away. This will help prevent spreading any germs to other people.
- Avoid exposing your infant unnecessarily to large crowds.
- Do not share food utensils such as cups, straws, forks or spoons.
- Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces such as door knobs, refrigerator handle, telephone, or water faucets.
- Do not smoke around children.
- If you think you have the flu, stay home, get rest, drink plenty of liquids and avoid using alcohol and tobacco.

Where can I find more information?

It's important to get information from trusted, reputable medical sources.

- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/>
- US government Pandemic Flu site at www.pandemicflu.gov
- World Health Organization at <http://www.who.int/en/>
- Michigan Pandemic Flu Plan at http://www.michigan.gov/mdch/0,1607,7-132-2940_2955_22779-122092--,00.html