

PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

WHAT IS PANDEMIC INFLUENZA?

An influenza pandemic occurs when a new form of the influenza virus starts spreading. Because it is a new virus, people have no resistance to it and it therefore spreads easily from person to person worldwide. People are also more likely to become sick in a short period of time. Previous influenza pandemics have led to widespread disease and death.

WHY SHOULD YOU PAY ATTENTION TO PANDEMIC INFLUENZA?

Pandemic influenza could start anywhere and spread quickly around the world, causing millions of deaths and severe illness. Although the worst-case scenarios predict that an estimated 2-3% of the world's population (or 160 million people) would die in a severe pandemic, the results will not be as severe if you take steps now to prepare for it.

WHO and FAO, along with donor nations, are working on scientific and technological innovations to help reduce the threat and minimize the effects of an influenza pandemic.

Because of the work being done, all countries and governments are being encouraged to participate in planning and preparation activities to prevent a pandemic.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO BEGIN PREPARING?

Being prepared means taking steps to reduce the spread of the virus, minimize hospitalizations and deaths, maintain essential services such as food supply, water, fuel and electricity, and reduce panic. Here are key activities to consider:

1: Review and update the national pandemic preparedness plan.

Work within a multi-sectoral task force that includes the public sector, private sector, and civil society to plan how to prepare for and respond to a pandemic.

2: Help districts, local governments, NGOs and communities to plan.

National-level organizations can provide assistance, support, and encouragement to district and local governments, NGOs, and communities in preparing their response plans.

3: Effectively communicate to the public about how to plan and prepare for a pandemic.

Public awareness and social mobilization to engage communities and their citizens can be achieved through effective community-based communication and public information campaigns.

FIVE REASONS WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO PREPARE FOR AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC NOW

1. There will be little time to prepare once an influenza pandemic occurs. Experts have predicted that the time for final planning and preparations will be a few weeks – at most.
2. Being prepared for a pandemic will help to reduce public panic and anxiety when an outbreak occurs.
3. If more people are prepared for a pandemic, health workers will be better able to assist greater numbers of people, especially those who need the most help, such as the elderly and people who are already ill with diseases such as HIV, TB, malaria, and chronic illnesses.
4. Being prepared will reduce the potential economic and social ramifications of the pandemic, and potentially save billions of dollars.
5. Preparing for a pandemic will help to prepare your country for other disease outbreaks, natural disasters, or other crises.

This set of informational materials provides guidance to help you start planning for a pandemic. With a bit of effort now, you can be prepared when a pandemic influenza outbreak strikes.