

Important information for you and your family on **PANDEMIC FLU**

More information

If you would like more information call
NHS Helpline on 0800 224488 Monday-
Sunday 8am-10pm

In the event of a flu pandemic there will
be announcements on the television,
radio and in the newspapers.

An influenza (flu) pandemic is currently being predicted by experts at the World Health Organization. This leaflet describes pandemic flu, the risk of it occurring in this country, what makes it different from the 'ordinary' flu we get every winter, and what the UK is doing to prepare for a possible influenza pandemic.

- **WHAT IS PANDEMIC FLU?**
- A pandemic is a rapidly-spreading, epidemic of a disease, that affects most countries and regions of the world. The symptoms of pandemic influenza are similar to those of 'ordinary' flu but are usually more severe.
- Some of the differences between pandemic and ordinary flu are listed in the table on the following pages.
- **HOW DOES A FLU PANDEMIC START?**
- Flu viruses are constantly changing, producing new strains and varieties. Pandemics occur when a virus emerges that is so different from previously circulating strains that few if any, people have any immunity to it. This allows it to spread widely and rapidly, affecting many hundreds of thousands of people. A new pandemic virus may be the result of an animal – usually an avian (bird) – virus and a human virus mixing to produce a new strain.

What is the difference between pandemic flu and ordinary flu?

- **PANDEMIC FLU**
 - Occurs about three times each century – at any time of the year
 - May affect 25 % or more of the population
 - It is a more serious infection for everyone
 - People of every age may be at risk of serious illness
 - A vaccine won't be available to start with – when it does become available the aim will be to immunise the whole population as rapidly as possible as vaccine supplies come through
 - Antiviral drugs are likely to be in limited supply and will have to be used to best effect according to how the disease develops, probably with frontline health care workers being given priority.
- **ORDINARY FLU**
 - Occurs every year during the winter
 - Affects up to about 10 % of the population
 - For most people it is an unpleasant but not life threatening.
 - The very young, the very old and people with certain chronic illnesses are most at risk of serious illness
 - Annual vaccination is available for those at risk of serious illness
 - Antiviral drugs are available to those at special risk

- **How likely is a flu pandemic ?**

- Three pandemics occurred in the last century (see opposite page). Scientists predict that another pandemic will happen, although they are unable to say when exactly that will be.

- **How likely is it that pandemic flu will spread to the UK?**

- The World Health Organization is on constant lookout for the first signs of a pandemic emerging so steps can be taken to try to contain it. However, with the numbers of people now flying all around the world the chances of it reaching the UK are much increased since the last pandemic in 1968. So once a flu pandemic affects other countries it will almost certainly reach the UK.

- **Pandemics during the last century**

- 'Spanish Flu'
- Year: 1918-1919
- Estimated deaths: 20-40 million (global), 250,000 (UK)
- Age group most affected: Healthy young adults (20-50 years)
- 'Asian Flu'
- Year: 1957-1958
- Estimated deaths: 1 million (global), 33,000 (UK)
- Age group most affected: Very young and very old
- 'Hong Kong Flu'
- Year: 1968-1969
- Estimated deaths: 1-4 million (global), 30,000 (England and Wales)
- Age group most affected: Very old and those with underlying medical conditions

- **How will a flu pandemic differ from an outbreak of ordinary flu?**
- It is difficult to say just how serious a pandemic will be. It depends on how easily the particular virus spreads, which are groups are affected most, the severity of the symptoms it produces, and how many deaths it causes.
- It is likely that pandemic flu will affect far more people than ordinary flu. Up to a quarter of the population could have been affected by the end of the pandemic (which may occur in two waves of infection several months apart, each lasting about two to three months). It is likely to be a much more serious illness.
- *And the vaccine against ordinary flu will not protect against pandemic flu.*
- **What will this mean for the UK?**
- Once in the UK, a flu pandemic will spread across the country in a matter of weeks and may cause:
 - High levels of influenza
 - Intense pressure on health services
 - Disruption to many aspects of daily life
 - Many deaths
- In anticipation of such an occurrence, the UK government has drawn up an Influenza pandemic Contingency Plan.

How likely am I to catch pandemic flu?

- You are more likely to catch it than ordinary flu because it spreads rapidly and very few people will have any immunity to it. Everyone will be at risk. Some groups of people may be more at risk than others, but every pandemic is different, so until the virus starts spreading it is very difficult to predict who these groups might be.
- With ordinary flu those groups of people more likely to become seriously ill include;
 - The very young
 - People over 65 years of age
 - People with existing medical conditions such as lung diseases, diabetes, cancer, kidney or heart problems
 - People who are immunosuppressed because of certain treatments, or illnesses such as HIV/AIDS.
- These may be different in a pandemic.

- Won't there be a vaccine to prevent pandemic flu?
- Flu vaccines have to be made specifically for the particular virus causing an epidemic or pandemic. That is why the annual flu vaccine changes each year. The vaccine also takes several months to produce. Steps will be taken to produce a vaccine to protect against a new pandemic strain of flu as quickly as possible, but a vaccine is unlikely to be available for the first wave of the illness.
- Depending on the timing of the second wave of a flu pandemic, scientists may be able to develop a vaccine so that people can get vaccinated. Preparation and research are already under way which should help towards making vaccine available as quickly as possible.
- Aren't there drugs to treat pandemic flu?
- There are antiviral drugs that may be effective in treating pandemic flu but their use before or during a pandemic is not straightforward. The UK is taking steps to ensure they are available. In the event of a pandemic, they will be used in the most effective way based on how the disease develops.

Key Facts about Pandemic Flu

- Until the virus is identified it is not possible to make a vaccine
- Pandemic Flu spreads more rapidly because people will have no immunity
- Pandemic Flu is likely to be more severe than 'ordinary flu'
- Groups at particular risk won't be known until the disease starts to circulate – they may be different from those in ordinary flu years
- Antivirals are being stockpiled but they have limitations – their effectiveness won't be known until the virus is circulating

Bird Flu Survival Kit

- The following will not stop you getting bird flu/normal flu. However it will increase your chances of surviving it. It will not be able to drain liquid out of your lungs either.
- However it will provide your body the means to fight flu, by making sure that the body stays hydrated and provided with easy to consume energy. Also the paracetamol will reduce fever and reduce aches.
- This kit should be placed near your bed, as when you get flu you will not feel like moving far even to the bathroom, hence the baby wipes and light sticks.

- 48 paracetamol tablets
- 200 x 50ml water sachets World Health Organisation approved, enough for two litres per day for 5 days, shelf life 4-5 years. (Without rehydration your body will lose fluids from feverous sweating and therefore be less able to fight the Flu.
- 50 mini or 10 bars of Kendal mint cakes, you won't feel like eating but these will give you energy.
- 5 x good quality glowsticks (in case of power cuts)
- 1 x flannel for reducing fever if applied to the head with water
- 1 x pack of baby wipes for washing as you will not be able & not willing to get to the bathroom often
- 1 x Thinsulate hat to wear when you are cold, as the head loses the most heat