PREPARING FOR
PANDEMIC FLU

Arlington, Virginia
Public Health

www.arlingtonva.us
Dear Arlington County Resident,

Because a pandemic flu is possible any year, Arlington County wants you to learn more about this potential threat. This guide provides information about pandemic flu, bird flu, and seasonal flu and how to protect yourself now.

Please remember these points:

• There is NO pandemic at present

• Practicing good cough etiquette and hand washing EVERY DAY prevents exposure to all flu viruses, even the common cold.

• Personal preparation NOW can decrease your risk during a pandemic, as well as other emergencies.

Things will change during a pandemic. Be prepared for a change in daily routine and make back up plans now. It will be important to keep up-to-date. During a pandemic, Public Health will give additional advice on how to avoid becoming sick and what to do if you are sick. In an emergency, Arlington County will provide public health information through the media, on our website www.arlingtonva.us, and emergency radio station 1700 AM Arlington.

We urge you to keep this brochure with your other emergency preparedness materials including the Emergency Guide from the Arlington County Office of Emergency Management.

Thank you for you attention to this important concern.

Sincerely,

Reuben Varghese, MD, MPH
Public Health Director
This brochure has been prepared for you by the staff from the Arlington County Public Department of Human Services, Public Health Division. Arlington County also wants to thank the Arlington Medical Society and the following physicians who reviewed the information in this brochure:

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For more information about pandemic influenza, visit these sites:

www.pandemicflu.gov
www.vdh.virginia.gov/pandemicflu
www.arlingtonva.us

For travel to areas with bird flu: www.pandemicflu.gov
Definitions

**Influenza** or flu is a viral infection of the lungs which may spread from person to person.

**Seasonal flu** is a common form of flu that spreads each winter. Flu vaccine along with hand washing, is the best protection from infection.

**Bird or avian flu** is a type of flu that affects poultry (e.g., chickens) and wild birds. Humans get this flu through very close contact with infected birds. Typically, bird flu cannot be spread from person to person.

**Pandemic flu** is an outbreak of a new or changed form of influenza virus that causes serious illness and may cause death among people.
Seasonal and Pandemic Flu are Different

Seasonal influenza (“flu”) is caused by a virus that affects the nose, throat, and lungs. It usually lasts between 3 - 7 days. Symptoms include fever, headaches, cough, aches, and sore throat. Pandemic flu symptoms are similar but may be more severe.

**Seasonal Flu**

- Occurs each winter.
- Affects about 10% of the population.
- For most people, it is unpleasant but not life-threatening.
- Those at most risk are the very young, and the very old.*
- Annual flu vaccine and hand washing are the best ways to protect against seasonal flu.
- Antiviral drugs are available to treat those at special risk.

*Others at risk include those with HIV/AIDS, cancer, and other chronic conditions such as kidney, lung or heart disease.

**Pandemic Flu**

- May occur at any time of year.
- May affect up to 50% of the population.
- Can be a more serious infection for everyone.
- People of every age may be at risk.
- A vaccine will probably not be available early in a pandemic.
- Antiviral drugs may be in limited supply and may not work.

**NOTE: Previous pandemics have occurred over long periods.**

A community may have 2 – 4 periods of flu lasting up to 4 months each.

During the 1918 pandemic, young healthy adults were at greatest risk for complications because of the particular virus strain.

Everyone is at risk of getting the flu, and everyone needs to take steps to prevent getting the flu!
Practice good health habits
daily to help prevent the flu

Flu may spread person to person when an infected person coughs, sneezes or touches things others use.

- **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze.

- **Wash your hands** often with soap and warm water for 20 seconds. If water is unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand gel.

- **Don’t touch your eyes, nose, and mouth.** Flu spreads when a person touches items covered with virus and then touches his eyes, nose or mouth.

- **Stay home when you’re sick** or have flu symptoms.

- **Avoid close contact with people who are ill.** Maintain at least a 3 feet distance.

- **Disinfect items people touch** (like door knobs, toys, keyboards, faucets, remote controls, phones, and switches). Use a labeled household disinfectant or chlorine bleach mixture*

- **An annual flu vaccine** can reduce your risk of getting seasonal flu during a pandemic.

- **Practice other good health habits.** Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat properly.

- **Avoid smoking.** Smoking may increase the risk of serious problems if you get the flu.

- **If you travel to areas with bird flu,** avoid live bird markets, farms, or direct contact with birds or their secretions.

* You can make a disinfectant by mixing ¼ cup store brand chlorine bleach with 1 gallon of cool water. Allow 10 minutes of contact on surface before wiping disinfectant off. Make fresh daily.
## Is It a Cold or the Flu?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Cold</th>
<th>Flu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fever</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Usual; high (100°F to 102°F; occasionally higher, especially in young children); lasts 3 to 4 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Aches, Pains</td>
<td>Slight</td>
<td>Usual; often severe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatigue, Weakness</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Usual; can last up to 2 to 3 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Exhaustion</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Usual; at the beginning of the illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuffy Nose</td>
<td>Common</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sneezing</td>
<td>Usual</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sore Throat</td>
<td>Common</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest Discomfort, Cough</td>
<td>Mild to moderate; hacking cough</td>
<td>Common; can become severe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>Antihistamines Decongestants Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines</td>
<td>Antiviral medicines- see your doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td>Wash hands often Cover your cough Stay home when ill Avoid close contact with anyone with a cold</td>
<td>Wash hands often Cover your cough Stay home when ill Avoid close contact with anyone with the flu Annual vaccination Antiviral medicine see your doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complications</td>
<td>Sinus congestion Middle ear infection Asthma</td>
<td>Bronchitis, dehydration pneumonia; can be life threatening</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Recognizing the Flu

Symptoms of flu for those age 5 and older include:

- Fever (up to 102-103 °F)
- Chills and sore throat
- Fatigue and weakness
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Aches and pains
- Headaches
- Dry cough
- Loss of appetite

**Influenza is more severe in children under 5 years,** especially those between the ages of 6 and 12 months.

- A fever can be the only symptom in babies.
- Children may have seizures, vomiting, irritability, sensitive eyes, headache, ear infections, red sore eyes, and sore muscles.
- Temperatures are often over 103.1° F.
- Children 3 years old or younger may have nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach pain.

**REMEMBER: The very young do not know how to tell people if they are sick with the flu. Tell-tale signs include hoarse and barking cough, irritability, and lack of appetite.**
Public instructions you may be asked to follow during a pandemic

Social distancing is used to keep people at safe distances from each other to prevent exposure to flu. For example, sporting events, movies and other meetings may be cancelled. Public Health officials will ask people to stay away from large crowds. During the early and late stages of a pandemic, quarantine and isolation may be recommended.

During quarantine, officials may ask a person exposed to flu to stay home for a period of time to see if he or she becomes sick.

During isolation, officials may ask a person sick with flu to stay home for a period of time until he or she cannot spread flu to others.

Most will follow these instructions voluntarily. Why? Because when you are sick with the flu, you want to stay home and rest. Virginia, like other states, has procedures to enforce compliance if necessary.

NOTE: if used, mandatory enforcement will occur at the beginning or end of a pandemic wave. This may help to slow the early spread of the flu or to help end the wave earlier.
Masks, Pan flu Vaccine, & Antiviral Drugs during a Pandemic

Masks, pan flu vaccine, and antiviral drugs will be in short supply early. Medical and EMS personnel will get them first because they are at highest risk of exposure to the flu. We want them to stay healthy to take care of the sick and recover quickly to get back to taking care of the sick.

More about Mask and Respirators

There is no clear scientific evidence about the benefits of wearing facemasks and respirators to help control the spread of pandemic flu among the general public.* Studies are underway, but results will not be available for several months to years.

Facemasks are loose fitting, disposable masks that cover the nose and mouth, such as surgical masks. Facemasks can help to protect your nose and mouth from droplets from other people’s coughs and sneezes and prevent you from coughing or sneezing on others.

Respirators such as the N95 fit tightly to the face and help to protect you from breathing in very small particles which might contain viruses. To work best, the N95 should be specially fitted for each person.

* Influenza viruses are transmitted through droplets. Recent evidence suggest that influenza viruses may also be transmitted in smaller particles than droplets.

Consider the following:

• Rather than relying on the use of facemasks and respirators, avoid close contact and crowded conditions during an influenza pandemic.
• Wear a facemask if you must enter crowded settings.
• Use a respirator if you must be in close contact with others who are sick with influenza.

Mask and respirators should be used once and placed in the trash.

For more guidance on masks and respirators, vaccines and antiviral drugs go to: www.pandemicflu.gov
Self Care Tips for Flu:

- Rest in bed (especially if you have a fever).
- Drink light liquids (water, tea, soda drinks, juice, clear soup, rehydration solution,* etc.) to prevent dehydration. It is important to drink fluids early and often to prevent dehydration.
- Eat easily digestible foods that appeal to you.
- Take aspirin-free pain relievers (e.g., acetaminophen or ibuprofen) as directed by your doctor to reduce fever and relieve aches and pains.
- Do not wake a child to give medication.
- Ibuprofen should not be used for infants less than 4 months old.

**WARNING:** Avoid aspirin or aspirin-containing products to prevent Reye’s Syndrome, a rare but serious disease.

*Examples of rehydration solutions: Pedialyte for kids, Gatorade for adults and teens. If a store bought solution is unavailable, mix the ingredients below until the sugar disappears to make your own rehydration solution.

- 4 cups of clean water
- 2 tablespoons of sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon of salt

**Recovery from flu:** Once the worst has passed, continue to eat and rest for faster recovery. Increase activity based on how you feel. **NOTE:** the only real cure for flu is time.
When to seek medical advice for an adult

If you have flu symptoms and are at risk for complications, consult your doctor right away.* Those usually considered at high risk for complications include:

- People 65 years or older
- People with chronic heart, lung disease or any other condition that requires regular medical attention (e.g. congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes)
- People who have diseases or treatment that weakens the immune system
- Pregnant women
- Young children

*NOTE: If antiviral medications are appropriate AND available, your doctor may prescribe these within the first 48 hours to reduce symptoms and duration of illness and to prevent more serious problems.

If you have bacterial pneumonia, you will need antibiotics. Otherwise, antibiotics are NOT needed to treat flu which is caused by a virus.
When to call 911 and take an adult to the emergency room

Seek care if you have any one of the following:

• Shortness of breath while resting or doing little
• Difficult or painful breathing
• Coughing up sputum or phlegm
• Wheezing
• Chest pain
• Fever for 3 to 4 days without improvement
• Feeling better and then suddenly having a high fever or becoming ill again
• Extreme drowsiness and difficulty awakening
• Disorientation or confusion
• Severe earache
• Sudden inability to function in a normally independent elderly person
• Constant vomiting
When to seek medical advice for a child

Seek medical care if a child has flu-like symptoms and any one of the following conditions:

- Is 3 months old or younger.
- Has a heart or lung disease or any chronic illness requiring regular medical care.
- Has a disease or treatments that weaken the immune system.
- Takes aspirin regularly for a medical condition.
- Has a change in breathing (such as breathing fast) or difficulty breathing.
- Is drowsy and loses interest in playing, watching TV, eating or drinking.
- Is very irritable and cries a lot.
- Urinates less than usual (less often than every 6 hours while awake) or has dry diaper for more than 3 hours if younger than 6 months, or longer than 6 hours if 6 to 23 months old.

*NOTE: If antiviral medications are appropriate AND available, your child’s doctor may prescribe this to reduce symptom duration and prevent more serious problems.

If your child has bacterial pneumonia, you will need antibiotics. Otherwise, antibiotics are NOT needed to treat flu which is caused by a virus.
When to call 911 and take a child to the emergency room

Seek care right away if your child:

- Has severe trouble breathing that is not caused by a stuffy nose.
- Has blue lips or hands, suddenly becomes pale, or has cold legs.
- Is droopy or unable to move.
- Is so sleepy that he or she does not respond when you try to get him or her up.
- Shows sign of pain, such as headache or stiff neck, especially if he or she also has a fever, is listless and his or her eyes are sensitive to light.
- Seems confused, sluggish or not acting normally.
- Has a seizure.
- Has any of the symptoms listed under “When to call 911 and take an adult to the emergency room.” (pg. 11)
Preparation at home for pandemic is important

Talk about how and where loved ones would be cared for if they become sick and what you need to care for them at home. Discuss end-of-life issues with your loved ones such as their wishes for resuscitation or use of a ventilator. Parents should decide how decisions will be made about their children if parents are unable to make those decisions. Adults should as always have a living will.

NOTE: Plan NOW for someone to care for children, those with special needs and pets if you are sick.

To prepare for pandemics and other emergencies, have at least two weeks worth of food, non-perishables, and health and emergency supplies. This includes prescription drugs. All these items may be difficult to get during a pandemic.

NOTE: Many health plans allow ordering 90 day supplies of medications. Ask your doctor if this is right for you.
Items to have on hand for an extended stay at home:

- Ready-to-eat canned meats, fish, fruits, vegetables, beans, and soups
- Protein or fruit bars
- Dry cereal or granola
- Peanut butter or nuts
- Dried fruit
- Crackers
- Canned juices
- Bottled water
- Canned or jarred baby food and formula
- Manual can opener
- Garbage bags
- Tissues, toilet paper, disposable diapers
- Pet food
- Needed medications and supplies such as glucose monitoring equipment
- Soap and water or alcohol-based (60 – 95%) hand wash
- Medicines for fever, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen
- Thermometer*
- Anti-diarrheal medication
- Rehydration solutions (see pg. 9, Self Care Tips)
- Cough syrup
- Portable radio
- Flashlight
- Batteries

*Have a thermometer for each member of the household to reduce passing germs from person to person.
In summary
There are many things you can do to prepare for a pandemic flu emergency. In an emergency, public health will provide you with additional information but don’t wait for an emergency to get ready. Act now!

- Be informed
- Make a plan
- Get involved

For additional information about how to prepare for flu in your community organizations or work sites, contact Public Health at (703) 228-5580.