



UNDERSTANDING PANDEMIC FLU

What is pandemic flu?

Pandemic flu is a worldwide outbreak of illness that occurs when a new influenza virus appears and spreads easily from person to person. Pandemic flu could happen at any time, and would affect people in Wisconsin and around the world.

How does pandemic flu occur?

Flu viruses are always changing. While most changes are small and only cause slight variations in the virus, major changes can result in a completely new virus that people have not been able to build up immunity to. As a result, the pandemic virus can cause more serious illness and death in people, and spread more easily than the seasonal flu virus.

Will bird flu cause the next pandemic flu?

If a bird flu virus, such as the current H5N1 virus, changes so that it spreads easily from person to person, it may become a new pandemic flu virus.

How is pandemic flu different from seasonal flu?

Pandemic flu and seasonal flu are different strains of the influenza virus. Seasonal flu happens around the same time every year and the viruses have previously been identified so people have developed some immunity to it. Pandemic flu can happen at any time throughout the year, and since it is caused by a new virus, few people will have a natural defense to it.

What age groups are most at risk during a pandemic?

Because few (if any) people will be immune to the new virus, all age groups will most likely be at risk during a pandemic, including healthy adults. Children and older people are more likely to get sick, because they generally have a harder time fighting infections.

What are the symptoms of pandemic flu?

In the past, the symptoms of pandemic flu have been similar to seasonal flu, but are usually more severe. Symptoms include fever, cough, congestion, sore throat, runny nose, weakness, and fatigue. Sometimes complications, such as pneumonia, can develop if someone has a severe case.

How does pandemic flu spread?

Pandemic flu spreads through the air from infected people that sneeze or cough. Commonly touched surfaces – such as shopping cart handles, door knobs, tables, handrails, etc. – can spread the virus to other people.

How is pandemic flu treated?

Pandemic flu is treated with supportive care, which includes making sure patients have plenty of rest and fluids. In some cases, treatment may include the use of antiviral medications.

What can I do to care for myself or my loved ones at home?

People with mild cases should stay in bed and rest, drink plenty of fluids, and take over-the-counter medication to treat fever and congestion.

When should I go to a hospital?

You should seek medical attention if you have severe symptoms such as a fever (more than 101 degrees), difficulty breathing, dizziness, fainting, dehydration, confusion, or severe vomiting. During a pandemic, hospitals may have more patients than their resources are able to handle.

For More Information, contact: Wood County Health Department
Phone: (715) 421-8911
<http://www.co.wood.wi.us/health/>

Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services
Phone: (608) 266-1251
<http://pandemic.wisconsin.gov>