

Preparing for Avian Influenza, Pandemics and Other Disasters

*How to safeguard
you and your family
during an emergency*



**WEST PENN ALLEGHENY
HEALTH SYSTEM**

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Introduction

Following the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918, the world learned a sobering lesson: without effective vaccines, advanced treatments and a vigorous public health infrastructure, people of all ages on all continents were at risk of becoming seriously ill and dying from a highly contagious virus.

While there have been many groundbreaking technological and medical advances since the early 20th century, the world is just as vulnerable to a pandemic. Today, avian influenza and other influenza viruses pose a grave threat to billions of people around the world. According to the World Health Organization, it is not a question of if but when the avian influenza pandemic will occur.

This guide will give you information to better safeguard you and your family in the event of an avian influenza pandemic. And it will provide invaluable guidelines about how to prepare you and your family for an emergency.



I. Understanding Avian Influenza

Since the world has not yet dealt with an avian influenza pandemic, most people don't understand how this illness is transmitted, diagnosed, treated—and prevented. Here is what you should know about avian influenza and how to protect you and your family from becoming seriously ill.

What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza, also known as the bird flu or the H5N1 virus, is found primarily in birds. Wild birds carry the virus but do not get sick from it. However, domestic birds—such as chicken, ducks and turkey—can become ill and die if infected by the virus. The virus has also been known to infect animals such as pigs and horses.

While the risk to humans is low, some people have become infected by the virus. A number of confirmed cases of human infection have been reported since 1997 in various countries around the world, many of which have resulted in severe illness and death. Scientists are concerned that the avian influenza virus could mutate into a strain that could start a global outbreak (a pandemic).

How serious would a pandemic be?

A pandemic could potentially kill more than 200,000 people and result in millions of hospitalizations and outpatient visits. Typically, pandemics last from two to three months and often occur in waves.

How is avian influenza transmitted?

Most cases of avian influenza have been the result of contact with infected poultry and/or touching surfaces contaminated with secretions or excretions from infected birds. You cannot get the virus from properly handled and cooked poultry and eggs. Recent studies have shown that cooking methods recommended by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration for poultry and eggs prevent infections and also destroy influenza viruses. There is speculation that when the virus mutates, it could more easily spread from human to human. During a pandemic, infected people rapidly transmit viruses by coughing or sneezing—often before their symptoms even appear. The incubation period—the period of time between infection and onset of symptoms—can take up to several days.

Who is most at risk of contracting avian influenza?

Currently, children and the elderly are most at risk for becoming seriously ill from avian influenza, although persons of all ages have and can contract this illness.

What are the symptoms of avian influenza?

Symptoms associated with avian influenza include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches
- Eye infections

If left untreated, avian influenza can cause life-threatening complications such as viral pneumonia and acute respiratory distress syndrome. See your doctor immediately if you develop flu-like symptoms. The avian influenza virus is diagnosed by collecting a swab from the nose or throat during the early part of the illness and sending it to a lab for testing.

What should be done if I or a member of my household becomes ill with avian influenza?

- If you are a health-care worker, be especially vigilant for the development of fever, respiratory symptoms, and/or conjunctivitis (i.e., eye infections) for one week after your last exposure to avian influenza-infected patients.
- If you become ill, you should seek medical care and, prior to arrival, notify your health-care provider that you may have been exposed to avian influenza. In addition, you should notify employee health and infection control personnel at your facility.
- With the exception of visiting a health-care provider, health-care workers who become ill should be advised to stay home until 24 hours after resolution of fever, unless an alternative diagnosis is established or diagnostic tests are negative for influenza A virus.
- While at home, you should practice good respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette to lower the risk of transmission of the virus to others. Cover your mouth and nose when sneezing, coughing or blowing your nose. Wash your hands after throwing used tissue in the garbage. Be sure to wash your hands with soap and water or with an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Treatment should include rest, drinking fluids, and analgesics for muscle pain and headache. Use of antivirals will be limited to those meeting priority criteria.

Health-care workers involved in the care of patients with documented or suspected avian influenza should be vaccinated with the most recent seasonal human influenza vaccine. In addition to providing protection against the predominant circulating influenza strain, this measure is intended to reduce the likelihood of a health-care worker becoming co-infected with human and avian strains, where genetic rearrangement could take place, leading to the emergence of a potential pandemic strain.

- Choose one person from your household to serve as the primary care provider. Other individuals in the household should limit contact with the patient and sleep in another room. Visitors should avoid entering the household while a patient has influenza. Those who enter the household should avoid contact with the patient.
- Do not share utensils, drinks, toothbrushes or cigarettes.
- Thoroughly clean surfaces contaminated by bodily secretions with any standard household cleaner or disinfectant, then rinse the surface with tap water. Wear rubber gloves while cleaning.
- Wash dirty dishes and utensils in a dishwasher or by hand with warm water and soap. You can wash laundry in a standard washing machine with warm or cold water and detergent. Be sure to wash your hands after handling soiled laundry. Try to prevent your clothes from coming in contact with soiled clothes.
- Persons with influenza should not take public transportation to visit a doctor; rather, they should be driven in a private car. Notify the doctor's office or clinic if you will be bringing a family member or friend for a visit. Patients should wear a surgical mask out in public and should be put in a private room while waiting to see the doctor.

How is avian influenza treated?

Antivirals are the primary treatment option for avian influenza. These drugs may help limit the symptoms and may reduce the chance of the virus spreading from person to person. In addition, antivirals may offer some protection for health-care workers who are in contact with an infected patient. However, antivirals must be taken within two days of the initial appearance of symptoms to be effective. Furthermore, there are signs that avian influenza can become resistant to antivirals. No vaccines are commercially available right now, although research efforts are underway.

What should be done if I or a member of my household has a milder form of the flu?

Avian influenza is not the only virus that can put you at risk. You can also contract many other forms of influenza. To prevent or lessen the severity of influenza, follow these guidelines:

- Drink plenty of fluids and get plenty of rest.
- To relieve head and muscle aches, take an analgesic (aspirin or acetaminophen). Children and teenagers with the flu should avoid aspirin unless specifically directed by a physician.
- See your doctor if your symptoms don't clear up in about a week.
- To safeguard yourself, get an annual flu vaccine.

How can I protect myself from avian influenza and other types of influenza?

- Cook poultry at 70° C to kill all viruses.
Make sure that all parts of the poultry are fully cooked (no pink parts) and that eggs are properly cooked (no runny yolks).
- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling raw poultry or raw poultry products. Also disinfect surfaces contaminated by poultry products.
- If traveling to an area of the world where avian influenza is prevalent, avoid rural areas and avoid ice cream and/or other foods that may contain raw or undercooked eggs.
- Continue to get an annual flu vaccine. While a flu shot cannot prevent you from contracting avian influenza, it will reduce the risk of simultaneous infection with human and avian influenza viruses.
- Try to stay at least three feet away from the breathing zone of persons who are sick. If you are sick, stay at home until you are fully recovered.



II. Planning for Emergencies

An emergency can occur without warning, leaving little time for you and your family to react. You can help protect yourself by learning what you can do to be prepared before an emergency occurs. Here are some guidelines to follow so you and your family will be able to quickly respond to an avian influenza pandemic or another emergency.

Know Your Community

The first step is to learn what types of emergencies may affect your community, how you will be notified if an emergency occurs, and what plans already exist to deal with such an event. Learn if your community has a warning system via television, radio or another type of alarm. Also, be aware of any plans that may exist for your child's school or your workplace. Once you have that information, you are ready to create an Emergency Plan and prepare an Emergency Ready Kit.

Creating Your Emergency Plan

- Meet with household members and discuss potential dangers, including pandemics, fire, severe weather, hazardous spills and acts of terrorism.
- Discuss plans for responding to each type of emergency.
- Discuss what to do in case of a power outage or personal injury.
- Draw a floor plan of your home and mark two escape routes from each room.

- Teach adults how to turn off the water, gas and electricity at the main switches.
- Post emergency contact numbers near all telephones. When possible, pre-program the numbers into your phone.
- Teach children how and when to dial 9-1-1 to get emergency assistance.
- Teach children how to make long-distance telephone calls.
- Choose a friend or relative out of the area for all family members to call if they become separated. It is often easier to call out of state during an emergency than within the affected area.
- Instruct household members to turn on the radio for emergency information.
- Pick two meeting places—one near your home and one outside your neighborhood—in case you cannot return home during an emergency.
- Take a CPR class. You can find classes in your area by calling the American Red Cross. Also, prepare a Basic First Aid Kit.
- Keep family records in a waterproof and fireproof safe. Inexpensive models can be purchased at most hardware stores.

Preparing Your Emergency Ready Kit

During an emergency, you may lose electricity, heat, air conditioning, water or telephone service for an extended period of time. You may also have to evacuate quickly. An Emergency Ready Kit contains all the items you will need to take with you if you have to evacuate, as well as items you will need to manage until your utilities can be restored. Items that you may consider including in the Ready Kit are:

- At least a three-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day); the water should be stored in sealed, unbreakable containers and should be replaced every six months.
- A three-to-five day supply of nonperishable packaged or canned food and a non-electric can opener.

- A change of clothing, rain gear and sturdy shoes.
- Blankets, bedding or sleeping bags.
- A first aid kit and any prescription medications, including insulin and heart and high blood pressure medications (check expiration dates periodically).
- An extra pair of glasses or contact lenses and solution.
- Denture supplies.
- A list of family physicians, important medical information and the style and serial number of medical devices, such as pacemakers.
- Special items for infants (formula, diapers and canned food), the elderly or family members with disabilities.
- A battery-powered radio, flashlight and plenty of extra batteries.
- Identification, credit cards, cash and photo copies of important family documents, including home insurance information.
- An extra set of car and house keys.
- Tools such as screwdrivers, cutters, scissors, duct tape, waterproof matches, a fire extinguisher, flares, plastic storage containers, needle and thread, pen and paper, a compass, garbage bags and regular household bleach.

Place supplies for your Emergency Ready Kit in an easy-to-carry container such as a duffel bag or bin. Store your kit in a cool, dry environment away from chemicals (such as bleaching products) and solvents (such as paint thinners and gasoline).

Contaminated Water

In a flood or other emergency, water supplies may become contaminated. If you think your water may be contaminated, you should purify it before using it for drinking, cooking, cleaning or bathing. The best way to purify water is to boil it for three to five minutes. Pouring the water back and forth between two containers will improve the taste by adding oxygen.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Working with neighbors in an emergency can save lives and property. Meet with your neighbors to discuss ways you can help each other until emergency crews arrive. Be aware of one another's special skills, and consider how you can help those in your neighborhood with special needs, such as people with disabilities and the elderly.

Helping People with Disabilities

If you think you may need assistance in a disaster, discuss your disability with relatives, friends and co-workers and ask for their help. Make sure they know where you keep emergency supplies and give a key to a neighbor or friend who may be able to assist you in a disaster.

If you have a severe speech, language or hearing disability:

- When you dial 9-1-1, tap the space bar to indicate a TDD call.
- Store a writing pad and pencils to communicate with others.
- Keep a flashlight handy to signal your whereabouts to other people and for illumination.
- Remind friends that you cannot completely hear warnings or emergency instructions. Ask them to be your source of emergency information as it comes over their radio.
- If you have a hearing ear dog, be aware that the dog may become confused or disoriented in an emergency. Store extra food, water and supplies for your dog.

Contact your local emergency information management office now. Many local emergency management offices maintain registers of people with disabilities so they can be located and assisted quickly in a disaster.

Wearing medical alert tags or bracelets to identify your disability may help in case of an emergency.

Know the location and availability of more than one facility if you are dependent on a dialysis machine or other life-sustaining equipment or treatment.

Caring for Pets

Create a survival kit for your pet. This should include:

- Identification collar and rabies tag
- Carrier or cage
- Leash
- Any medications (check expiration dates periodically)
- At least a two-day supply of food and water, as well as food bowls
- Veterinary records (most animal shelters do not allow pets without proof of vaccination)

What to Do During a Power Outage

- Remain calm and assist family members or neighbors who may be vulnerable if exposed to extreme heat or cold.
- Locate a flashlight with batteries. Do not use candles, as they can cause a fire.
- Turn off sensitive electrical equipment such as computers, VCRs, DVDs and televisions.
- Turn off major electric appliances that were on when the power went off. This will prevent power surges when the electricity is restored.
- Keep your refrigerators and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- Do not use the stove to heat your home, as this can cause a fire or fatal gas leak.
- Use extreme caution when driving. If traffic signals are out, treat each signal as a stop sign. Come to a complete stop at every intersection and look before you proceed.
- Do not call 9-1-1 to ask about the power outage. Listen to the news radio stations for updates.

Stay Calm and Stay “Tuned”

During and after an emergency occurs, it is important to remain calm. Even after the event, there may still be many dangers. What seems like a safe distance or location may not be. Stay “tuned” to your local emergency station and follow the advice of trained professionals. Unless told to evacuate, avoid roads to allow emergency vehicles access. Your actions during and after an emergency can save your life and the lives of others.



Important Telephone Numbers

Police:

Fire Station:

EMS/Paramedics:

American Red Cross (local chapter):

Electric Emergency:

Natural Gas Emergency:

Water Emergency:

Poison Control:

Your physician(s):

Your closest hospital:

Other important numbers:



Further Information

For more information about avian influenza and disaster preparedness, visit these Web sites:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov

World Health Organization
www.who.int/en

Additional information on preparing for emergencies is available at the following Web sites:

American Red Cross
www.redcross.org

FEMA
www.fema.gov



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