



Pandemic and Seasonal Flu: What You Need to Know to Be Prepared

The flu is an illness caused by a virus that can spread from person to person. The flu can cause mild to severe illness, and even death. Some of the symptoms of flu may include fever or feeling feverish, chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, and fatigue.

What is seasonal flu?

Different strains (or types) of flu viruses circulate each year. This is what is known as seasonal flu. In the United States, flu season can begin as early as October and last as late as the following May. For more information about seasonal flu, visit hchealth.org.

What is pandemic flu?

Sometimes new strains of flu may appear that people have little or no immunity to. When this happens, the virus can spread easily between people and cause an outbreak on a global scale — a pandemic. For example, the 2009 H1N1 swine flu was considered a pandemic flu. Although flu pandemics are rare, they can have severe consequences, including high rates of worker absenteeism, a crowded health care system, and disease and death among residents. For more information about pandemic flu, visit <http://www.flu.gov/>.

What is the Howard County Health Department (HCHD) doing to prepare for a pandemic flu?

The HCHD in coordination with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) has been planning for a pandemic event. These plans and activities are part of the Maryland Influenza Plan and Pandemic Influenza Plan; pandemic influenza exercises for emergency personnel; partnering with local, state, federal and private agencies to form a comprehensive approach to prepare for, prevent and lessen the effects of a flu pandemic; and maintaining a stockpile of antiviral medications and medical supplies.

What can you do to protect yourself and your family from both seasonal and pandemic flu?

Getting vaccinated is your best protection against the flu. Seasonal flu vaccine is available each year, usually in September or October. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get their yearly flu vaccine as soon as possible. In the event of a pandemic, a vaccine may or may not be available. You should get the vaccine if it is available to you.

It is always good to follow basic personal hygiene measures to protect yourself from illnesses, such as the flu. Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds and help young children do the same. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze; then throw the tissue in the trash. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces. **Avoid close contact, such as kissing or sharing cups or eating utensils, with sick people. If you are sick, stay home and avoid contact with other people to protect them from catching your illness.**