

# Pandemic Influenza

Preparing churches for a pandemic

## What is a flu pandemic?

A flu pandemic is a disease outbreak of a new flu virus that spreads very quickly and affects many people worldwide within a relatively short amount of time. Pandemic flu is different from seasonal flu because there will be no human immunity to the new virus. A flu pandemic can occur at any time of the year.

The avian flu strain (H5N1) that is currently circulating is not a pandemic. Although there have been human cases in Asia, Europe, and Africa, the virus has been mostly transmitted from bird to human with only a few suspect cases of human-to-human transmission. However, if the virus changes into a strain that can be easily transmitted among humans, it will cause a flu pandemic.



## How could a pandemic affect you?

Should a flu pandemic strike there would be serious effects on medical, educational, professional, religious and social entities. Goods and services could be in short supply; medical and governmental services might be overwhelmed; and people could face emotional and financial hardships. Due to the devastating effects, aid from the outside will be limited. Each county would need to take care of its own population. Therefore, we would have to rely solely on local resources. Churches can play a large role in helping the community prepare for a pandemic.

## What can churches do to prepare for a flu pandemic?

There have been three influenza pandemics in the last century and according to the World Health Organization we are now closer to a pandemic than we have been since the Hong Kong Flu in 1968. During a flu pandemic, churches may be asked to cancel activities to limit the spread of the disease. The collaboration of churches with other community organizations and public health will be vital when an influenza pandemic occurs. By planning for a flu pandemic, churches can better protect their community from emergencies in general.

Suggestions on organizing a pandemic flu plan:

- ◆ Discuss how your normal services would be affected by a flu pandemic.
- ◆ Educate your congregation by distributing materials on pandemic influenza including information on what pandemic flu is and checklists of things individuals and families can do to prepare themselves.
- ◆ Stress the importance of frequently washing hands and covering coughs with a tissue or sleeve to prevent germs from spreading.
- ◆ Set up policies to follow in the case of a pandemic, including roles and responsibilities of your staff, and procedures to enact your plan when a pandemic is declared by public health.
- ◆ Determine the supplies needed to maintain wellness of your congregation, including hand soap and paper towels.
- ◆ Develop or increase food pantries to subsidize the people in your community that may not be able to afford an emergency supply of food and water.
- ◆ Plan how the church can care for church members and support vulnerable people in the community if church activities have to be cancelled.
- ◆ Encourage church members to participate in community preparedness activities or organizations. The North Georgia Medical Reserve Corps is a network of volunteers dedicated to assisting in a public health crisis.

For more information on pandemic flu visit [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov), [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) or contact your local Health Department. To request a free presentation about the pandemic flu please call Jennifer Moorer at 706-272-2125, x346, [www.nghd.org](http://www.nghd.org)

