

What you can do *NOW*

STAY HEALTHY! Basic good health practices will be very important in keeping ourselves strong enough to fight off this virus. These include:

- ⇒ Getting the regular seasonal flu shot
- ⇒ Getting a pneumonia shot, if recommended by your healthcare provider
- ⇒ Not smoking
- ⇒ Maintaining good nutrition and hydration
- ⇒ Exercising regularly and maintaining a healthy weight
- ⇒ Frequent hand washing
- ⇒ Avoiding and/or breaking habits that cause you to put your fingers or objects in your mouth (nail biting, licking fingertips to turn pages, or putting pens in your mouth)

AT HOME: Plan for service disruptions, and be prepared (store food staples and household items). The Social Services Department in each town keeps a list of persons who might need special assistance during an emergency. To receive an application to be included on that list, call your local Social Services Department. Also, make sure that loved ones have a plan and you know what it is.

AT WORK: Find out if you can work from home. Plan for a possible reduction or loss of income if your employer closes or you are unable to work from home.

AT SCHOOL: Plan home learning activities in case the schools are closed for an extended time.

TRAVEL: Consider what you will do if you are unable to get out to check on people who depend on you, or to get basic supplies.

Overview:

A severe pandemic could change the patterns of daily life for some time. It is important to know what to expect if a pandemic outbreak occurs. People may be asked or required to stay home if *community containment* measures go into effect. Due to widespread illness during a pandemic, basic community services might be interrupted including store or bank operations and the availability of supplies. Things would not return to normal for up to several months. There would likely be a high number of people who fall ill. Adults need to **plan** to protect themselves, their children and pets as well as relatives and friends who rely on them. People who recover would have some immunity from the disease and they could be vital to a recovery effort. **Have a plan, be prepared, stay informed.**

Each member town has an Emergency Operation Plan to address all types of disasters, including chemical, fire, biological, and weather-related emergencies. This all-hazard approach allows governments and citizens to prepare of any type of contingency.

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Serving the Communities of:

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Thanks to the East Hartford, CT Department of Health & Social Services for material in this brochure.



EHHD

Eastern Highlands Health District

*Preventing Illness & Promoting Wellness for
Communities in Eastern Connecticut*

A Family Guide to

Pandemic Influenza

November 2006

Communities need to prepare for emerging, rapidly spreading diseases, including the threat of pandemic flu. Your local government and EHHD are preparing daily, but Emergency Preparedness is also an individual responsibility. Everyone should know what to expect during a pandemic and what actions to take in order to lessen the spread of disease. This guide highlights steps that you can take to prepare for a flu pandemic.

Please keep this guide for easy reference.

Questions & Answers

What is Pandemic Flu?

Pandemic Flu is a widespread outbreak of disease that occurs when a **new** flu virus appears that people have not been exposed to before. In a pandemic, the flu virus would spread across the world, affecting a large part of the population. Many more people than usual would be at risk of becoming ill. We have had three pandemics in the last century—including the 1918 Spanish Flu that killed up to 40 million people worldwide and more than 500,000 Americans. Two more recent outbreaks, in 1957 and 1968 were far less severe than the 1918 pandemic.

Who would help?

In the event of a town-wide emergency, police, fire and other staff will be called to duty to help ensure public health and safety. Local public health, medical, hospital, transportation, school, and volunteer organizations will also be called upon to help. The Eastern Highlands Health District has recruited and trained over 300 community volunteers to help out in the event of an emergency like pandemic flu.

Where would information be available?

Area radio and TV stations will broadcast up-to-date information and instructions to residents on

- ◇ WILI (1400 AM & 98.3 FM)
- ◇ WHUS (91.7 FM)
- ◇ Channel 14 (Charter Public Access Community TV)

The Health District website (www.ehhd.org) will also have updated information for all member towns.

What if citizens can't stay at home?

It is most likely that residents would be able to stay at home in a pandemic flu outbreak. You may be told to stay in your home or at your job site for a limited time. In the event that residents are asked to evacuate due to flooding or some hazardous material exposure, or if you need care outside your home, emergency shelters or care centers would be set up. Instructions on where to go, transportation options, and what to bring would be provided through the media contacts listed above.

What about vaccinations?

Pandemics are **not** the same as seasonal flu (the kind that comes every year and for which many people get vaccinations). A pandemic is the result of a **new** virus (a novel virus), and **no vaccine will be available at the start of the pandemic** and it may take up to **6 months** for one to be developed. That is why it is so important to be prepared for a pandemic. A number of agencies are watching the situation to inform international and national health agencies about what is going on. Our federal government is working with drug makers to increase resources for research and to make new vaccines.

Impact of a pandemic on local communities

While a pandemic would affect our whole nation, **local** preparedness will be key to saving lives. A pandemic may come and go in waves, each of which could last for months and lead to high levels of illness and death. Daily activities would be disrupted, especially if workers and residents in towns and states across the country fall ill at the same time. Local disruptions could include:

- ◇ Business closings or reduced workforce hours
- ◇ Store inventory reductions, including food, clothing, and supplies
- ◇ School and childcare center closings
- ◇ Public transportation interruptions, including buses and trains
- ◇ Limited access to banks, stores, and restaurants
- ◇ Cancellations of civic meetings, worship services, and social events
- ◇ Reduced government services (postal, public utilities, electricity, phone) and some town services including Dial-a-ride
- ◇ Limited access to area hospitals, including emergency rooms
- ◇ Inability to provide services to special needs populations
- ◇ The internet and cell phone services may be overwhelmed causing delays

Public Health Response to a Pandemic

Once a vaccine is developed, the first people to receive it would be “first responders”: health care workers, police, fire, military personnel, and others who provide critical services. Until a vaccine becomes widely available, the Director of Health will work with town and school officials to institute community containment measures that are meant to slow or stop the spread of a disease.

Two key public health measures are:

Isolation & Quarantine:

If there is an outbreak of Pandemic Flu, the Director of Health has the authority to ask or order individuals or families showing symptoms of the flu, or those thought to be exposed to the virus to stay in their homes or be cared for in a location set up for that purpose. **Isolation & quarantine** were used very successfully in 2003 during the SARS outbreak in Toronto, Canada. Residents who are ordered to stay in their homes will be supported by area and state health officials with medicines if necessary, as well as food and household items.

Social Distancing:

In order to protect healthy people and reduce the risk of disease, the Director of Health may ask healthy people to stay home or take “snow days” from work or school. This is called “**social distancing**” or “**community shielding**” and is likely to go on for several weeks. Because the flu will spread quickly during a pandemic outbreak, it is best not to have people coming together at work sites, schools, or other public places or gatherings. *Residents need to anticipate that community shielding will occur and make sure they have adequate supplies of food, water, medicines, and other necessities.*