

Pandemic Preparation



BY PAT GLEICH

The World Health Organization and the United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention tell us that it is only a matter of time before a global flu outbreak occurs. To be safe, we must prepare.

The Basics

A pandemic is a worldwide disease outbreak caused by the emergence of a new virus for which people have no immunity and for which there is no vaccine. Pandemic flu is a virulent human flu that spreads easily from person-to-person, causing serious illness and possibly death. Scientists and health professionals believe that avian flu strain H5N1 presents the most risk for a pandemic in the next two to five years. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predicts that in the United States this pandemic could infect 90 million people and result in as many as two million deaths.

The United States government has announced that a vaccine against pandemic flu will not be available for at least six months after an outbreak begins. It also is likely that medication to treat the flu will be in very short supply. This means that the only remaining defense against flu is decreasing contact among people so that the virus cannot spread person-to-person. Businesses and schools will be ordered to close and organized gatherings, such as church services and activities, will be prohibited.

Getting Prepared

The spread of any flu virus can be inhibited through good basic hygiene. However, while covering coughs, properly disposing of used tissues, using hand sanitizers, wiping down doorknobs, handrails and other frequently touched items in public

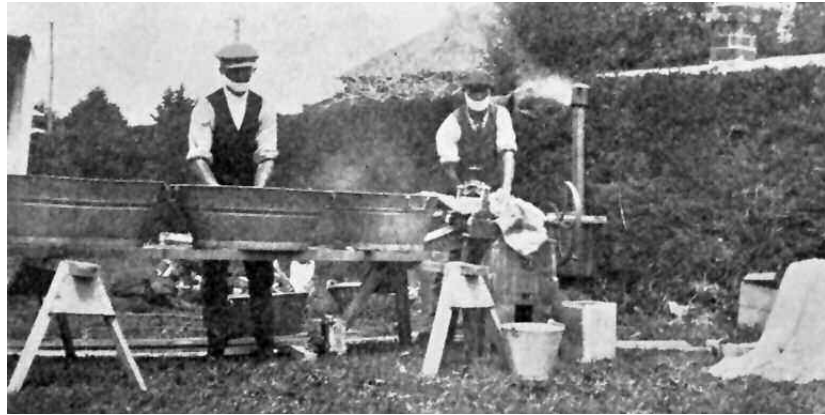


Photo courtesy of National Health Ministries

The influenza outbreak of 1918 took the lives of more than 400,000 people around the world. These men are working at a makeshift influenza hospital in New Zealand, during that pandemic.

places with a chloride bleach solution and staying home if one is ill will help, these measures will not stop a pandemic. We must prepare for and stock supplies for an extended period of containment—home quarantine. Families should develop communication plans so that when the government imposes containment, family members can gather where survival supplies are stored. Congregations should identify people who are at risk because of chronic medical conditions or who live alone so that someone is poised to check on them during a pandemic.

Some personal preparedness steps to take:

- Store a three- or four-week supply of nonperishable food. If you cannot get to a store, or if stores have limited deliveries, you will need to rely on stocked items. Power disruptions are likely, so foods that do not require cooking or heating are most useful.
- Store water or purchase water purification tablets to ensure safe water. You will need one gallon per person per day of safe water.
- Stock first-aid supplies, prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs. Ask your physician to write your prescription for at least 60–90 days so that you have an extra supply. Stock first-aid and health items, including pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines and fluids with electrolytes and vitamins.
- Masks are recommended for use if someone becomes ill. Disposable N95 respirators are recommended, but like all masks, must be changed periodically. Stock at least 20 per family member.
- Go back to mechanical devices in case sporadic electrical power outages occur. Be certain you have a corded telephone, a wind-up clock and non-electric appliances such as can openers, radios and lights. Buy extra batteries for battery-operated radios and televisions. Collect puzzles, books, drawing paper and crayons for children.

For additional information go to www.pcusa.org/nationalhealth.

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