



**North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Public Health • Office of the State Health Director
1931 Mail Service Center • Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-1931
Tel 919-707-5000 • Fax 919-870-4829**

Michael F. Easley, Governor
Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary

Leah Devlin, DDS, MPH
State Health Director

Updated January 23, 2006

North Carolina Public Health Responds to Influenza
“FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS”

North Carolina Public Health is working daily to protect you and your family from the flu and other public health threats. This FAQ has been developed to help you understand what’s happening in North Carolina in regards to the flu.

FACTS

- **North Carolina Public Health is more prepared to respond to all types of flu than we have ever been before.**
- **Experts agree that flu pandemic will occur again some time in the future, but no one knows when. There is no Pandemic Flu in the US or the world at this time.**
- **A strain of Avian Flu that has the potential to become a pandemic has emerged in Southeast Asia and is being closely monitored to see if it becomes more contagious for humans.**

GENERAL INFORMATION

Q: What is the difference between Avian Flu (Bird Flu), the Pandemic Flu, and the yearly seasonal flu?

A: There are three different types of flu:

February 2007

- 1) **Seasonal Flu**: This is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus. It occurs annually in North Carolina usually from December through March with the peak in January and February. Typically the yearly flu results in 1,000 deaths each year in NC, mainly in the very old and very young.
- 2) **Pandemic Flu**: This is flu that causes a global outbreak, or pandemic, of serious illness that spreads easily from person to person. Pandemic flu can emerge any time during the year. It results from a new influenza virus that becomes easily transmitted from human to human. Because it is new, no one would be immune to the virus and there would not be a vaccine. The projected number of deaths for NC would be around 5,600 and the disease might seriously affect people of all ages, not just the very old and the very young. There were three flu pandemics in the 1900s: the Spanish Flu in 1918 (550,000 deaths in the United States), the Asian flu in 1957 (69,800 deaths in the United States), and the Hong Kong Flu in 1968 (33,800 deaths in the United States).
- 3) **Avian Flu**: This flu is caused by avian influenza viruses, which occur naturally among birds. There are lots of strains of Avian flu and most have no effect on humans. But, health authorities are concerned about one strain that is circulating in birds in Southeast Asia and Turkey and has been associated with some human cases. Currently it is not easily transmitted from human to human. In order for it to cause a pandemic flu, it would have to mutate into a virus that is easily transmissible from human to human. This particular strain may or may not become a pandemic, but it is the focus of a worldwide public health monitoring effort. Since December 2003, there have been over 150 cases of confirmed human cases of Avian flu in Southeast Asia and Turkey. Of those infected people, over 80 have died. Health experts say that this high mortality rate is misleading, because only the most severely affected people have been diagnosed. There probably have been other Avian flu cases in humans in Southeast Asia and Turkey that went undiagnosed because the people weren't seriously infected.

Q: Do we have Avian Flu in the US?

A: There are no reports of avian flu in the US of the type currently being watched in Asia. There are other avian flu varieties in the US that do not pose a health threat to humans.

Q: Should I get a flu shot and will it protect me from the Pandemic Flu?

A: Yes, the annual flu shot is a good idea for everyone who can take it, but it will not protect you from a possible new pandemic flu.

Q: Is North Carolina ready to respond if a Pandemic Flu develops?

A: North Carolina is better prepared to respond to a flu pandemic or any other public health emergency that we have ever been before. In large part this is the result of new federal funds invested in public health following the events of September 11, 2001.

- NC has had a Pandemic Flu Plan since October, 2004.

- Seven regional response teams cover the state with increased capacity for early detection and response. These teams have the public health expertise to deal with potential health threats.
- The Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response has been created to provide expertise, establish partnerships with other first responders, and lead the response.
- Most local health departments have preparedness coordinators, who are working at the local level to prepare for a pandemic flu and other public health threats.
- Laboratory capacity for highly infectious agents has been doubled and regional capacity expanded as well.
- The North Carolina Hospital Emergency Surveillance System (NCHESS) is the first electronic reporting system in the country for hospital emergency departments to report chief complaints on every Emergency Department visit to the health department. This will allow for the early detection of any unusual event in NC, so public health officials can respond quickly.
- Twelve hospitals have medical epidemiologists in place to further enhance public health surveillance.
- Other technology that is in place for early alerting includes the Health Alert Network (HAN), which provides public health professionals early warning on any public health problem.

Q: How can I protect myself from the flu?

The best defense is a good offense. Get a flu shot every year. Practice good health hygiene – wash hands frequently, cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze, stay home from work if you are sick and keep children home if they are not well. Contact your physician if you become ill so you can be evaluated for the flu.

Q: Is it safe to eat chicken now?

A: Yes, chicken available in the US is safe to eat. Always be sure to cook it thoroughly to protect you from food borne illness like salmonella.

Q: Should I worry about wild birds around my house?

A: No. The strain of avian flu that has public health experts concerned is not found in North Carolina or North America.

Q: How will I know if a pandemic flu is occurring?

A: Communication has improved dramatically since the last pandemic in 1968. Today, we will know very quickly if a flu virus mutates and starts affecting humans in large numbers. Public health experts will advise the public on how they can best protect themselves and their families.

Q: Who is in charge of the NC response to pandemic flu?

A: Many state and local agencies are involved in the response. The NC Pandemic Flu Response Plan is part of the NC Emergency Operations Plan, which outlines who is responsible for the different components of an effective response. Public health, working with laboratories and

healthcare providers, will probably be the first to identify potential pandemic flu cases in NC. but the rapid response will involve many other partners.

Q: What can be done to control a pandemic flu if it happens?

A: The core components of the NC Pandemic Flu Response Plan are:

- Command and Control – organization of response partners and response measures.
- Surveillance – monitoring for disease.
- Vaccine Preparedness and Response – planning and executing mass vaccination programs.
- Antiviral Preparedness and Response – plans for utilizing specialized flu medications.
- Mass Care – how and where to care for ill patients.
- Preparedness in Healthcare Facilities – plans for keeping hospitals and doctors’ offices safe and working.
- Communication – plans for assuring the right people have all the right information in a timely way.

Q: What is isolation and quarantine?

A: Isolation is when a person who is already ill is kept away from others to keep from spreading the disease. Quarantine is when people who may have been exposed to a contagious disease but not yet sick are kept away from others also to keep from spreading the disease. Both measures will be important to controlling disease in a flu pandemic.

Q: Where can I find more information about flu?

A: The NC Pandemic Flu Response Plan can be found on the internet at www.ncpublichealth.com under Epidemiology, Communicable Disease Control. The United States government has a website with current flu information as well as planning tips for communities, businesses, and school; this information is available at www.pandemicflu.gov. CDC also maintains a website with current flu information at www.cdc.gov/flu. The World Health Organization information on flu can be found at www.who.int.