

Pandemic Influenza Alert

Dealing With the Flu When it Arrives

December 10, 2007

This is the fourth of DAQ's 2nd series of Pandemic Influenza Alerts designed to help DAQ employees understand the threat of an influenza outbreak. The alerts describes commonsense actions you can take now in preparing for a pandemic.

If a pandemic influenza develops, it will happen because some of the viruses that were transmitted from bird to human will have evolved to be efficient at transmitting itself from human to human. Droplets spread influenza during face-to-face contact.

Incubation period for influenza is usually 1-3 days after contact with the virus. People infected with influenza are contagious or infectious 24-48 hours before symptoms appear and they are contagious after symptoms appear. Adults are contagious for 3-5 days after symptoms appear and children are contagious up to 7 days.

At the start of an influenza pandemic, there are basic preventive measures to take at home and at work to prevent becoming infected with the flu.

What to do at Home

Make preparations now so if you have to "isolate" yourself and your family, which you have ample supplies to last during the crises. So, be prepared, keep these items in your home:

- Enough food and water per person for a week or more—Choose foods that will keep for a long time and do not require refrigeration or cooking. Include a non-electric can opener.
- Medications—Keep at least a week's supply of the medicines you take regularly.
- Items to relieve flu symptoms—Stock medicines for fever, such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen. Cold packs, blankets and humidifiers will also be useful. Have extra water and fruit juices on hand in case someone is sick—the flu virus causes dehydration, and drinking extra fluids helps.
- Items for personal comfort—Store at least a week's supply of soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toilet paper and cleaning products.
- Activities for yourself and your children—Include books, crafts, board games, art supplies and other things to do. Include things that do not require electricity.
- Cash—Banks may not always be open and cash machines may not always work.
- Pet supplies—Remember food, water and litter.
- Cell phone or regular phone with a cord—Cordless phones will not work if the power is out.
- Large trash bags—Garbage service may be disrupted or postponed for many days.

Make household and family emergency plans

- Agree on a point of contact where all family members can check in if you are separated during an emergency.
- Decide who will take care of children if schools are closed.

- Plan to limit the number of trips you take to shop or to run errands. Also, remember public transportation routes and times may be limited.
- Think about how you would care for people in your family who have disabilities if support services are not available.
- Be prepared to get by for at least a week on what you have at home. Stores may not be open or may have limited supplies.

What to do at Work

The main defense to protect yourself from the virus will be Social Distancing. This will minimize the kind of social contacts that enables virus transmission. One example of a social distancing is limiting functions that require assembling lots of people into a single indoor space, such as meetings, conferences, or workshops. Here are some examples of social distancing practices that you can adopt at work during an influenza outbreak to prevent the spread of the virus.

- Avoid handshakes - Handshaking as a customary greeting enables virus transmission through skin-to-skin contact. Substitute something else — smile, wave or bump elbows.
- Avoid the lunch time rush - Whether you eat lunch in the break room, a snack bar or at a restaurant, avoid the rush. Eat earlier or later to avoid the rush, or eat with just a few people in the break room, a conference room or a large office.
- Use telemeetings to replace face-to-face meetings - Reducing the number or duration of face-to-face meetings limits the opportunity for virus transmission. Shift as much of the agenda as possible to email or teleconference.
- Use larger conference rooms - If you must meet face-to-face, use the largest available conference room. Larger rooms have better ventilation, and there's more room to spread out.
- Avoid using public pens - Public pens are found at the retail counter, at the building or hotel guest registration, at the bank, and many other places. Use your own pen. In conference rooms, don't use the public whiteboard markers. Carry your own.
- Avoid the commuter rush periods - If you commute via public transportation, take advantage of the flex time policy to shift your working hours. Avoid times when you'll be exposed to crowded buses.

If you become infected with influenza, the most important preventative measure that persons with influenza can choose is to isolate themselves until 1 week (respiratory isolation) after they become ill with influenza. People who are not infected with influenza may need to choose to avoid all people who may be potentially infected (social distancing).

Social Distancing will not be able to be done by some people. In addition, not every one who strictly applies these principles will avoid infection. But Social Distancing will be able to protect some people. Since medical preventive measures such as vaccines and antiviral will not be available for at least months, you may be faced with either no protective measures or using Social Distancing as a preventive means.

Face Masks May be Helpful

Very little is known about the benefits of wearing face masks and respirators to help control the spread of pandemic flu. In the absence of clear science, the steps below offer a "best estimate" to help guide decisions. They will be revised as new information becomes available. Theoretically the use of medical masks, especially types like N95 masks, could help protect against influenza. Consider wearing a face mask if:

- You are sick with the flu and think you might have close contact with other people.
- You live with someone who has the flu (you therefore might be in the early stages of infection) and need to be in a crowded place. Limit the amount of time you spend in these crowded places and wear a facemask while you are there.

- You are well and do not expect to be in close contact with a sick person but need to be in a crowded place. Limit the amount of time you spend in these crowded places and wear a facemask while you are there.

Consider wearing a face mask if:

- You are well and you expect to be in close contact with people who are known or thought to be sick with pandemic flu. Limit the amount of time you are in close contact with these people and wear a respirator during this time. These recommendations apply if you must take care of a sick person at home.

Information on Pandemic Influenza

For more information Division of Air Quality web page on Pandemic Influenza Information at <http://daq.state.nc.us/employee/pandemic/>.