

PANDEMIC FLU

(Source of Information – Preparing for Emergencies website – Jan 09)

<http://www.ukresilience.gov.uk/pandemicflu.aspx>

Pandemic Flu

Influenza pandemics are a natural phenomenon that have occurred from time to time for centuries – including three times during the last century. They present a real and daunting challenge to the economic and social wellbeing of any country, as well as a serious risk to the health of its population.

There are important differences between 'ordinary' winter flu and pandemic flu. These differences explain why we regard pandemic flu as such a serious threat.

Pandemic influenza is one of the most severe natural challenges likely to affect the UK, but sensible and proportionate preparation and collective action by the Government, essential services, businesses, the media, other public, private and voluntary organisations and communities can help to mitigate its effects.

These inter-pandemic years provide a very important opportunity to develop and strengthen our preparations for the potentially devastating impact of an influenza pandemic, and the Government will continue to take every practical step to prepare for and mitigate its health and wider socio-economic effects.

The **Department of Health** is the lead department for planning for a human influenza pandemic. However, given the wide impacts of a pandemic all government departments are involved in planning to mitigate its impacts.

This website brings together available information on a possible influenza pandemic in order to support planning at all levels of society.

However well developed, plans are unlikely to be successful without the active support of individuals and communities. Therefore, a key part of the response will be to encourage the public to follow government advice and adopt basic hygiene measures to manage or reduce their own risk of catching or spreading the virus.

Ensuring that all of us are fully aware of the necessary precautionary and response measures, are prepared to cooperate actively with them and accept responsibility for helping themselves and others must therefore be an integral part of our overall preparedness strategy.

Pandemic Influenza vs Avian Influenza (bird flu)

Avian influenza ('bird flu') is an infectious disease **of birds**. A highly pathogenic A/H5N1 avian influenza virus – which is extremely contagious and fatal in domestic poultry species – has prompted particular concerns in recent years as the possible source of a human pandemic.

Whilst the virus has infected humans, such infections have only been recognised in a small proportion of those who have been exposed to infected birds, and to date there has only been limited evidence of person-to-person transmission.

Scientists believe that avian viruses possibly played a contributory role in the last three human influenza pandemics.

All planning needs to reflect the possibility that the next pandemic might arise at any time and from sources other than the H5N1 virus.

The Preparing for Emergencies website has a lot more information on the current situation on avian influenza (bird flu).