



Preparing for **PANDEMIC INFLUENZA**

A Washington State Overview

2006

Partners in Emergency Response

State Government Planning Partners

Department of Health

Military Department

- Emergency Management Division
- Army National Guard

Department of Agriculture

Washington State Patrol

Department of General Administration

Department of Social and Health Services

Office of Financial Management

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Department of Information Services

Department of Personnel

Office of the Attorney General

Local Health Agencies

Local health agencies play key roles in all phases of pandemic influenza planning, response and recovery – disease tracking and monitoring; hospital and health care provider coordination; stopping the spread of disease; and educating the public.

A complete list of contacts for local health agencies is available on the Department of Health Web site at www.doh.wa.gov/lhjmap.

Federal/International Partners

The World Health Organization tracks and monitors disease around the globe in collaboration with many national health organizations. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provide information, guidance and support to state and local public health officials. Washington officials collaborate with Canadian counterparts to help ensure a coordinated response to a pandemic.

Other Partners

Hospitals

Health care providers

First responders (police, fire and emergency medical services)

Elected officials

Government service agencies (i.e., transportation and public utilities)

Businesses

Schools

Tribal governments

Community-based organizations

Table of Contents

Governor's Message	1	Emergency Response	7
What is Pandemic Influenza?	2	Food Safety	
Planning Challenges	3	Disruption of Services	
Tracking and Monitoring Disease	4	Business and Government	
Vaccines and Antiviral Medicines	5	Preparedness	
Emergency Response	6	Public Information and Outreach	8
Hospitals and Health Care		Stay Healthy – Be Prepared	9
Disease Control and Containment			

Message from Governor Chris Gregoire



The safety and security of Washingtonians is one of my top priorities. Preparing our communities for the possibility of a global flu pandemic is an immense and continuous responsibility.

I have directed the Washington Department of Health and Military Department's Emergency Management Division to take the lead on this very important work.

A pandemic would touch everyone; we must prepare now. While we have made good progress, many challenges remain and successful planning will take the combined effort of government, business, hospitals, and the public.

Here are some things you can do to help:

- Use good health habits: simple things like washing your hands often and covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing are very effective at preventing the spread of disease.
- Stay at home when you're sick to prevent the spread of illness among your co-workers.
- Develop home and workplace emergency plans.

Caring for your health and preparing for emergencies will help keep Washington safe and strong. Thank you for doing your part.

Sincerely,

Christine O. Gregoire

Governor

What is Pandemic Influenza?

Influenza is a viral illness that infects the respiratory system, including the lungs. It spreads easily from person to person. To prepare for each flu season, manufacturers develop a vaccine that provides some protection against influenza viruses we see every year, known as seasonal flu. Still, seasonal flu results in thousands of hospitalizations and deaths in the United States each year.

A worldwide outbreak of influenza, called a pandemic, can occur when a new influenza virus emerges. People would have little or no immunity, and a vaccine would not be available for some time.

Preparing for a pandemic is a big challenge; it will take more than government alone. Everyone should be personally prepared for all types of emergencies, including pandemic influenza.

Influenza pandemics have occurred three times in the past 100 years: 1918, 1957 and 1968. During the 1918 pandemic, more than 20 million people died worldwide with 500,000 deaths in the United States and 1,600 deaths in Seattle.

Currently, avian influenza – or bird flu – is a big concern. Although avian influenza primarily infects birds, it can be passed to humans through direct and extended contact, such as handling an infected bird. The virus does not spread easily between people, although that could change. If that happens, it could lead to a pandemic.

There have been avian influenza outbreaks in domesticated birds in parts of Asia and Europe, and cases of humans infected through close contact with infected birds. So far, no people have been infected with avian influenza in the United States.

One way or another, everyone would be affected by a massive influenza outbreak. Pandemic influenza could kill hundreds of thousands of Americans – possibly more than 40,000 Washingtonians.

Emergency response resources could be overwhelmed as pandemic influenza spreads across the state and the country. Up to 35 percent of the population could require special medical care.

Limiting death and illness will require a coordinated effort involving international, federal, state and local agencies. In Washington, the Department of Health is working closely with federal agencies, various state agencies, local health officials and others to prepare for the worst.

Planning Challenges

The Department of Health and the state Division of Emergency Management are the lead agencies for statewide public health emergencies.

“Most people don’t realize how devastating a flu pandemic could be. We must have plans in place to meet the challenges and protect the health of people in our state. We’ve done some good work, but we have a lot more to do.”

– **Mary C. Selecky**
Washington Secretary of Health

There are many challenges in preparing for an influenza pandemic.

- Tracking and monitoring the spread of disease requires coordination and communication among cities, states and nations.
- It will take months to develop a vaccine effective in fighting a new flu virus.
- Antiviral medications currently used to reduce the effects of seasonal flu may not be effective against a new virus.

- The extraordinary demand for medical care during a pandemic would have a severe impact on hospitals and health care professionals. Because pandemics often arrive in “waves” of six to eight weeks duration, hospitals have to be prepared to handle a large influx or surge of patients for extended periods of time.
- Everyone would be affected, from disruption of basic services to school closures.
- Accurate and timely information about the course of the pandemic and precautions/treatments must be available to everyone. This would require ongoing coordination between government officials and media outlets, such as radio, television, newspapers and the Internet.

This overview describes ongoing efforts in the state of Washington to prepare for the possibility of a pandemic flu outbreak. It outlines the many challenges involved, the work to meet those challenges, and how people can help protect themselves.



Tracking and Monitoring Disease (Surveillance)

Tracking new strains of flu and monitoring its spread are crucial. The World Health Organization and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention coordinate monitoring efforts on the international and national levels. The Department of Health coordinates these efforts in Washington.

Tracking influenza relies on a network of health care providers, nursing homes, laboratories and local health agencies around Washington providing flu specimens to the state Public Health Laboratories.

Tracking influenza is particularly important before a pandemic begins. This makes it possible to identify flu viruses with the potential to cause a pandemic.

Under certain conditions, some avian or animal influenza viruses can infect humans. The state Department of Agriculture is expanding efforts to educate the public and poultry producers about the proper handling of domestic birds, as well as testing dead or diseased birds suspected of carrying flu viruses. The agency also tests eggs for the presence of bird flu antibodies.

The state Department of Fish and Wildlife responds to reports of dead wild birds and submits them for testing. In addition, the agency is working with the state of California to test blood samples from healthy sea birds captured during research. Should an outbreak of avian or animal influenza occur, plans and resources are in place to help contain the spread of the virus.



Vaccines and Antiviral Medicines

Vaccination is a cornerstone of seasonal influenza prevention and control. However, the flu vaccine developed each season most likely will not be effective against a new strain of flu. It could take several months to develop and produce a vaccine that would provide protection. A specific vaccine for a new strain of flu cannot be produced until the new strain is identified.

The federal government is working to increase vaccine-manufacturing capacity in the United States. Research is also underway to develop ways to produce vaccines more quickly.

Although there are antiviral medicines for the treatment and prevention of seasonal influenza infections, it is unknown if available medicines such as Tamiflu® (oseltamivir) will be effective against a new pandemic strain.

Part of the state's response may include buying antiviral medicines to have on hand. The Department of Health is considering how much would be necessary to meet the need.

Supplies of antiviral medicines are limited, and individuals should not stockpile them. This may create shortages of the medicines needed to treat people who are seriously ill, including health care and other front-line workers. Indiscriminate use of antiviral medicines could lead to flu strains that are resistant to medication.

Other important safeguards against spreading infections include washing your hands often and covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing. Use these good health manners every day to prevent the spread of respiratory infections.

Vaccines and antiviral medicines are only one line of defense against influenza and shouldn't be considered a "cure-all."



Emergency Response

Activities

Hospitals and Health Care

A pandemic would likely strain the capacity of hospitals and other health care providers. Major issues include:

- Increased outpatient visits.
- Increased hospital admissions.
- Demand for intensive care and isolation facilities.
- Staff and resource shortages.

A severe pandemic on the scale of the 1918 outbreak could make nearly two million people in Washington sick. More than 200,000 could need hospital care and close to one million may require a doctor.

Public health agencies are working with health care providers to plan for massive increases in hospital admissions and the need for health care services. That work includes plans for addressing staff and equipment shortages and identifying facilities to help when hospitals are over capacity.

Disease Control and Containment

Influenza virus is spread from person to person through close contact by droplets produced when an ill person sneezes or coughs. Early in a pandemic, isolating people who are sick is one approach that may be used to help slow the spread of flu.

It may also be necessary to check international travelers for illness or impose travel restrictions. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would provide technical assistance in evaluating international travelers. Once a pandemic is firmly established, these measures may not be effective.

Public health agencies may also discourage people from gathering in large groups – a step called *social distancing*.

Isolation:

For people who are ill

Isolation involves separating people who have a contagious disease from those who are healthy. It includes restricting their movement to stop the spread of that illness.

Quarantine:

For people who have been exposed but are not ill

Quarantine involves separating and restricting the movement of people who, while not yet ill, have been exposed to an infectious disease and may become ill and spread it to others.

Through all phases of a pandemic, the Department of Health will collaborate with local health agencies to monitor influenza conditions, provide guidance and technical assistance and develop plans for social distancing measures to decrease the spread of disease.

Local health agencies have primary responsibility for controlling and preventing infection in their communities. Measures to do this could include:

- Separating well people from people who are sick or who may have been exposed to the virus.
- Discouraging or canceling large indoor gatherings.
- Closing schools – The local health officer has the authority to close schools and would do so in consultation with the Department of Health, local government officials and the school district.

Food Safety

Avian influenza is not transmitted through properly cooked food. Most health experts agree the majority of avian flu infection in humans has resulted from close contact with infected domesticated poultry or related contaminated surfaces. If avian influenza were found in poultry in this country, local, state and federal agriculture officials would take immediate steps to contain the spread of the virus among the flocks.

The state Department of Agriculture works closely with commercial poultry operations that are participating in a national program to test healthy flocks for the presence of flu viruses. Should a flock test positive for flu viruses that could sicken people, those birds would be prevented from entering the food supply. Agriculture officials would then act quickly to ensure the virus could not spread to other poultry operations.

Disruption of Services

During a pandemic, services provided by medical facilities, banks, stores, restaurants, government agencies, transportation systems, and schools might be disrupted. Public gatherings such as concerts and worship services may be canceled.

People should prepare for a pandemic as they would for any other emergency, including maintaining supplies of food, water and other essential items. (See back cover for more information and a list of resources.)

Planning for a pandemic is crucial to maintaining business operations, providing important services and products, and protecting the health of employees.

Business and Government Preparedness

Businesses and government agencies must be prepared for large numbers of employees missing work for a variety of reasons. Illness, caring for family members or lack of transportation could keep people off the job.

Businesses should develop plans for operating during a pandemic. They should prioritize critical work functions and provide employees with the information and resources they need.

Public health, at the state and local levels, is working with businesses to encourage and assist with planning. The state Emergency Management Division and the Department of Health are working with other state agencies to ensure state government continues to provide essential services during a pandemic.



Public Information and Outreach

People need timely, accurate information – especially during emergencies. They want to know what is happening and what they can do. Clear, understandable information can provide direction and calm fears. That is why public information is such a crucial part of effective emergency planning and response.

Clear communication is essential before, during and after an emergency. The latest pandemic flu information and resources are available online at www.doh.wa.gov/panflu.

Public health and partner agencies are working to inform the people of Washington about pandemic flu through the media, the Internet and a variety of publications.

The state and local health agencies are developing materials to help people in Washington understand what a pandemic is, what to expect during an outbreak and how they can be prepared.

Outreach efforts include:

- Providing information on simple and effective things people can do to help prevent the spread of flu.
- Providing training and communication resources to groups and organizations.
- Working with internal and external partners to promote consistent prevention messages and coordinated outreach programs.
- Working with organizations that serve special needs communities.

Information on pandemic flu preparedness is regularly shared between local, state, federal and Canadian partners. These groups are striving to provide clear, consistent and credible information people can use to make informed decisions.



Stay Healthy – Be Prepared

Keep Germs to Yourself

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing, coughing or blowing your nose.
- Throw used tissues in the trash as soon as you can.
- Always wash your hands after sneezing, blowing your nose or coughing, after touching used tissues or handkerchiefs, or after using the restroom.
- Always use warm water and soap if available. If you can't use water and soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizers are a good alternative to clean your hands.
- Try to stay home if you have a cough and fever.
- Call your health care provider as soon as you can if you have a cough and high fever. Follow their instructions, including taking medicine as prescribed and getting lots of rest.
- If asked, use face masks provided in your health care provider's office or clinic waiting room and follow other instructions to help stop the spread of germs.
- Don't share things like towels, lipstick, toys or anything else that might be contaminated with respiratory germs.
- Don't share food, utensils or beverage containers with others.
- Wash your hands often.
- Get your annual flu shot to protect against seasonal influenza.

Make Personal and Family Emergency Plans

- Establish a point of contact for family emergencies.
- Decide who would take care of children if schools were closed for an extended time.
- Think about how you would care for people in your family with disabilities if their support services are not available.

Keep These Items In Your Home for Emergencies

- **Food and water**
Have enough to last a week or more. Choose foods that do not require refrigeration or cooking. Be sure to include a manual can opener. Flu causes dehydration; have extra water and fruit juices on hand in case someone is sick.
- **Medications and equipment**
Have a week's supply of the medicines you take regularly and a digital thermometer.
- **Items to relieve flu symptoms**
Have medicines for fever on hand, such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen along with cold packs and blankets.
- **Items for personal comfort**
Have a supply of soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toilet paper and cleaning products.
- **Activities for yourself and your children**
Have some things to do that don't require electricity, such as crafts, board games and books to read.
- **Cash**
Banks may not always be open and cash machines may not always work.
- **Pet supplies**
Pets will need food, water, litter and other supplies.
- **Cellular phone or wired land-line phone**
Cordless phones will not work when the power is out.
- **Large trash bags**
Garbage service may be disrupted or postponed for many days.

Resources on the Web

Washington State Department of Health – www.doh.wa.gov/panflu

Washington Military Department, Emergency Management Division – www.emd.wa.gov

Washington State Department of Agriculture – www.agr.wa.gov

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife – www.wdfw.wa.gov

U.S. government official pandemic influenza site – www.pandemicflu.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – www.cdc.gov

World Health Organization – www.who.int

American Red Cross – www.redcross.org

Local health agencies – www.doh.wa.gov/lhmap

For More Information

Washington State Department of Health
Office of Communications
PO Box 47890
Olympia, WA 98504-7890
360-236-4027

This document is available upon request in alternative formats:
1-800-525-0127

(For the hearing impaired, call 1-800-833-6388).

Translations of many preparedness materials are available on the
Department of Health Web site at www.doh.wa.gov/phepr/factsheets.htm.



PUBLIC HEALTH
ALWAYS WORKING FOR A SAFER AND
HEALTHIER WASHINGTON