

Monterey County Health Department Preparedness Minute

Volume 2, Issue 3

March 1, 2007

How Pandemic Influenza Could Affect Your Work Place

Unlike natural disasters, an influenza pandemic will be widespread, affecting not only our community but also many areas of the United States and other countries all at the same time.

A pandemic will be an extended event, with multiple waves of outbreaks in the same geographic area; each outbreak could last from 6 to 8 weeks. These waves of outbreaks may occur over a year or more.



What about where I work?

- **Absenteeism** - A pandemic could affect half of the workforce during periods of peak influenza illness. Employees could be absent because they are sick, must care for sick family members or for children when schools or day care centers are closed. It is also possible that workers may be afraid to come to work or the employer might not be notified that the employee has died.
- **Change in people's buying patterns** - During a pandemic, demand for items related to infection control are likely to be high, while demand in other goods may decline. Individuals and families may also change the ways in which they shop. People may try to shop at off-peak hours to reduce contact with other people. There also may be an increased interest in home delivery services or drive-through service, to further reduce contact with other people.
- **Interrupted supply/delivery** - Shipments of items from those areas severely affected by the pandemic may be delayed or cancelled.
- **A change in how your day-to-day work gets accomplished** — In order to reduce close contact between people you might find that more people telecommute from home. You may be participating in fewer face-to-face meetings by doing business by teleconference or web conference. Employers may stagger work shifts if your work does not need to be preformed during the same time of day. People who have regular contact with the public may find that they are doing their job more by phone or behind a Plexiglas barrier.



What A Pandemic Flu Could Mean To the Economy

Each winter, the flu kills approximately 36,000-40,000 Americans, hospitalizes more than 200,000, and costs the U.S. economy over \$10 billion in lost productivity and direct medical expenses.

As staggering as these figures are, a pandemic flu that could kill over a half of a million people in the U.S., hospitalize 2 million more, and cost our economy an estimated \$160 - \$675 billion.

Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce

The purpose of this short publication is to inform Monterey County staff about preparedness issues ranging from emerging communicable diseases to personal preparedness. If there is a specific topic you or your staff are interested in please contact the Preparedness Program at klahnk@co.monterey.ca.us.



What can I do now to prepare at my work place?

Prepare to stay at home. Staying at home from work when you are sick is the most important thing you can do to protect others.

Prepare at home. Make sure you and your family are prepared by having your own plan. Plan for situations such as the schools being closed, sick family members or not being able to get to the store for a period of time. Update your home emergency kit to make sure you have copies of health information for all family members.

Prevent the spread of viruses that cause colds and flu— By washing hands frequently. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner, such as Purell® or store-brand. By covering your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing. Try using the crook of your elbow or your shoulder for cover, instead of hands. Remember to throw away used tissues right away. If you use tissues to cover your cough or blow your nose, dispose of them in the nearest waste bin immediately after use, then wash hands.



Know policies. Ask your employer or union about sick leave and policies about absences, time off, and telecommuting.



Encourage planning. Every business, organization and agency should have a plan for making sure essential work can get done if large numbers of employees are absent over many months. You may be asked to perform duties that are not typically part of your job.

Explore other ways to get your work done. Find ways to reduce personal contact, such as increased use of emails or phone conferences. Plan to work from home if possible.

Get direct deposit— In the event of a pandemic staffing shortages will affect payroll but by having your check directly deposited you can avoid the worry about your paycheck.

By the way, what is the difference between seasonal, avian and pandemic flu?



Seasonal (or common) flu is a respiratory illness that can be transmitted person to person. Most people have some immunity, and a vaccine is available.

Avian (or bird) flu is caused by influenza viruses that occur naturally among wild birds. The H5N1 variant is deadly to domestic fowl and can be transmitted from birds to humans. There is no human immunity and no vaccine is available.

Pandemic Flu is virulent human flu that causes a global outbreak, or pandemic, of serious illness. Because there is little natural immunity, the disease can spread easily from person to person. **Currently, there is no pandemic flu.**

This issue of *Preparedness Minute* is brought to you by the Monterey County Health Department's Preparedness Program. For more information Contact:

Linell McCray
Preparedness Coordinator—755-4739

Karen Smith
Public Information Officer – 755-4639