

Public Health Preparedness: Preparing for a Pandemic Outbreak – What You Can Do

By Kristen Hildreth, Health Promotion Coordinator

(This is the first in a series of articles dedicated to public health preparedness. Look for future articles on topics such as Isolation and Quarantine, and Personal Preparedness.)

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza A virus emerges for which there is little or no immunity in the human population, begins to cause serious illness, and then spreads easily from person-to-person worldwide. The federal government, states, communities, and industry are taking steps to prepare for and respond to an influenza pandemic.

A pandemic is likely to be a prolonged and widespread outbreak that could require temporary changes in many areas of society, such as schools, work, transportation and other public services. Informed and prepared individuals can take appropriate actions to decrease their risk during a pandemic. Public health strategies for responding to an emergency may include isolation and quarantine, public information, and clinics to provide appropriate medications.

Any response to an emergency, whether it is a pandemic outbreak or natural disaster, will need the involvement and cooperation of Medina County citizens. You will play a vital role in any response, so your preparedness is important. You can help by preparing your family, your business, and your community.

Communities, Businesses, and Individuals Should:

- Develop preparedness plans as you would for other public health emergencies.
- Participate and promote public health efforts in your state and community.
- Talk with your local public health officials and health care providers; they can supply information about the signs and symptoms of a specific disease outbreak.
- Implement prevention and control actions recommended by your public health officials and providers.
- Adopt business/school practices that encourage sick employees/students to stay home.
- Anticipate how to function with a significant portion of the workforce/school population absent due to illness or caring for ill family members.
- Practice good health habits, including eating a balanced diet, exercising daily, and getting sufficient rest, and take these common-sense steps to stop the spread of germs.
 - Wash hands frequently with soap and water.
 - Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues.
 - Stay away from others as much as possible if you are sick.
 - Avoid places and events where people congregate.

Stay informed about pandemic influenza and be prepared to respond.

Consult www.pandemicflu.gov frequently for updates on national and international information on pandemic influenza. Use national and local pandemic hotlines that will be established in the

event of a global influenza outbreak. Listen to radio and television and read media stories about pandemic flu.

The Medina County Health Department (MCHD) is partnering with local agencies, including the Medina County Emergency Management Agency, to prepare for a pandemic event. Our staff is involved in training and exercises designed to test our response capabilities. The MCHD has identified several locations in the county for the dispensing of medicines, if needed, and continues to work with local officials on issues that impact the health of county residents. For more information call the Medina County Health Department at (330) 723-9688, (330) 220-6265, or (330) 336-4136, or visit www.medinahealth.org.

Sources:

PandemicFlu.gov
www.pandemicflu.gov/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov