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To date, no case of avian flu caused by the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus has been detected in the Americas

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The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) recommends that all countries and communities in the Americas prepare themselves for a possible flu pandemic

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or contact the Ministry of Health in your country



## WHAT CAN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE WORKERS DO TO PREPARE FOR A POSSIBLE FLU PANDEMIC?

A flu pandemic occurs when a new highly aggressive influenza virus emerges that can spread easily between humans around the globe. There have been three influenza pandemics in the past century. The most severe occurred in 1918 and sickened one-third of the global population, killed an estimated 40 million people, and caused social and economic disruption around the world.

The international community has been on alert since 2003, when a new highly aggressive H5N1 avian influenza virus caused large outbreaks in birds ("bird flu"). Though the H5N1 virus is known to affect primarily birds, if the virus gained the ability to infect and transmit easily between humans, the chances of a new global influenza pandemic would increase.

### Why do primary health care (PHC) teams need to prepare?

A moderate to severe influenza pandemic could overwhelm the surge capacity of health services in any country. In a matter of weeks, a pandemic virus could easily spread throughout the world, infecting many people in a short period of time. Hospitals could quickly become overcrowded with seriously ill patients, and PHC teams would likely have to limit referrals and manage more patients at the community level and in their homes.

Experience with previous pandemics and, more recently, with severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) has shown the importance of protecting health workers so they can better care for patients. During a pandemic, poorly prepared health services can facilitate transmission of the pandemic virus in health facilities by mixing very ill influenza patients with vulnerable patients seeking care for other health problems, along with large numbers of people seeking medical attention out of anxiety and fear.



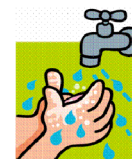
**Take care of yourself to be able care for others**

### What can PHC teams do now to prepare?

Health care workers are an essential part of an effective community response to a pandemic. All primary care units should prepare a contingency plan to respond properly in the event of an influenza pandemic or a major emergency of any kind. Following are some key actions that PHC teams can adopt now to prepare for a future pandemic:

#### ! Incorporate basic protective measures into your daily practice

- ◇ Health workers can protect themselves while modeling key practices in front of their patients, e.g., washing their hands whenever they have contact with patients and covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or their upper sleeve, rather than with their hands.
- ◇ Annual influenza vaccination helps protect health care workers and helps reduce transmission of the seasonal influenza virus to vulnerable patients. In case of an influenza pandemic, specific vaccines will be developed for the pandemic virus.



**Wash your hands for safer care**

#### ! Prepare and equip your facilities

- ◇ Make sure your facilities have good ventilation and are equipped with personal hygiene products such as soap, tissue, paper towels, alcohol-based hand rub, gloves, and face masks, as well as cleaning products for contaminated surfaces and objects.

#### ! Work with local authorities and other institutions to prepare a contingency plan in case of a pandemic or any major emergency.

*e-FluInfo* will help you identify effective community measures to reduce human transmission of an influenza virus and the impact of the next influenza pandemic.