

# Facts:

from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment



## Pandemic influenza: questions and answers

### What is pandemic flu?

A pandemic of influenza, or flu, occurs when a new flu virus rapidly spreads from human-to-human and country-to-country around the world. A new virus can spread rapidly because most people are not immune to it.

Pandemics are not just particularly bad flu seasons. In fact, they are not seasonal at all; they can happen any time of year.

### What is the difference between a pandemic and an epidemic?

An epidemic is an outbreak of a disease that occurs in one or several limited areas, like a city, state, or country. Once the disease affects many countries across the globe, it is called a pandemic. In the last century, several pandemics of influenza occurred – the biggest one in 1918. During that pandemic, at least 500,000 Americans died. There were as many as 20-50 million deaths worldwide.

### What is the state health department doing to prepare for pandemic flu?

If there is a widespread flu outbreak, Colorado and every other state in the country will respond with some new procedures, and many standard, time-tested disease control methods.

- The state's Department of Public Health and Environment and local health agencies across the state monitor influenza in our communities by working with doctors, hospitals, laboratories, and nursing homes to identify unusual numbers of people with flu-like illnesses.
- The state laboratory checks samples from patients with flu-like illnesses to help identify which flu viruses are circulating in our state.
- The Department of Public Health and Environment and your local public health agency work together to plan for public health emergencies. Staff practice their plans to better prepare for disease outbreaks.

### Getting ready for pandemic influenza

A pandemic is caused by a strain of virus that is **new** – no one will be immune and it will be highly contagious. During a pandemic, you might be advised to stay home for a period of time to reduce the spread of the disease.

More information on home preparedness is available from Ready Colorado at [www.readycolorado.com](http://www.readycolorado.com).

#### Home preparedness checklist

- Food and water
- Items for personal comfort
- Cash
- Medications and equipment
- Large trash bags
- Family emergency plan

### Reliable sources of information

#### Colorado HELP hotline

877-462-2911 (toll-free)  
M-F, 11 a.m. – 7 p.m.; S-S, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

#### Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

[www.cdphe.state.co.us/epr](http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/epr)  
303-692-2030 or 800-886-7689

#### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)  
800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)  
888-232-6348 (TTY)

#### U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

[www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)  
Ready Colorado  
[www.readycolorado.com](http://www.readycolorado.com)



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### Personal Hygiene

Start now to teach your family to practice good hygiene.

- Wash your hands frequently. If you can't wash, use alcohol-based hand rubs.
- Show your children how to "cover your cough" by coughing and sneezing into your sleeve instead of your hands.
- Stay home when you are sick and keep the children home from school until they are well.

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