

PANDEMIC INFLUENZA GUIDELINES

Public health authorities have identified characteristics and challenges unique to a pandemic such as:

- When the pandemic influenza virus emerges: its global spread is considered inevitable.
- Most people will have little or no immunity to a pandemic virus, and a significant percentage of the population will require medical care.
- Death rates will be high due to the significant number of people who become infected, the virulence of the virus, the characteristics and vulnerability of affected populations (elderly, those with chronic disease, and children) and the effectiveness of preventative measures.
- Past pandemics have spread globally in two, and sometimes three, waves.
- Medical supplies will be inadequate. Vaccine for the virus will possibly not be available for six months. The supply will be limited, availability of antiviral drugs is likely to be less than the demand, and hospital beds and other supplies will be limited.
- Pandemics also cause economic and social disruption such as school and businesses closing, travel bans, and canceling of community events.
- Care of sick family members and fear of exposure can result in significant absenteeism in the workforce.

A pandemic flu planning effort has been underway for several years in Virginia and continues. A pandemic flu response plan was first developed in 2002. Major revisions were made to the plan in early 2006 based on publication of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Pandemic Influenza Plan in November 2005. Virginia is working closely with national and other state partners to coordinate efforts. VDH is leading public information efforts to raise awareness of the possibility of pandemic influenza occurring, and to promote better understanding of the complex issues that will arise if pandemic flu becomes a reality. These issues include:

- Distribution of scarce medications and vaccine supplies
- Impact on daily activities:
 - Closure of schools
 - Cancellation of major public events
 - Health care facilities use
 - Community, business, and government operations

Pandemic influenza is likely to be a prolonged and widespread outbreak that could critically affect all areas of society. The ability to normally move human and material resources would be affected during a natural disaster.