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Pandemic Flu Preparation: The Workplace and the Community

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"Pandemics are global in nature, but their impact is local. When the next pandemic strikes, as it surely will, it is likely to touch the lives of every individual, family, and community. Our task is to make sure that when this happens, we will be a Nation prepared."

Michael O. Leavitt, Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Yes, we can expect our lives to be "touched" by an avian influenza pandemic. Our diets and daily routines will be altered, and the concern of all of us will be to protect ourselves and our families. Since we don't know how serious the pandemic may be in our communities, it only pays to prepare. Advance planning can make our homes safe and comfortable. It's not an overwhelming task, and there are many guidelines to help. Look at it this way: The better we are prepared, the better we will respond and rebound, and when it's all over, the better and stronger will be our families, community, and state.

Business as usual?

Probably not. Pandemic influenza will have an impact on the ability of all organizations to continue business as usual. Experts predict a 3-6% decline in the global economy, depending on the severity of the pandemic.

An important step in making family preparations is to know the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan for your place of employment and to know what impact an outbreak may have on the business and, in turn, on your income.

These are some issues for your family meetings:

1. What is your employer's leave policy in the event of a pandemic? Do you have to be sick to use sick leave or can you use it to care for a family member?

2. If not at work, how will you communicate with your employer/supervisor?
3. Does your health insurance cover additional medications for emergency storage?
4. What plans does your employer have to protect employees from contracting the flu?
5. Will you be able to work from home? How would your work be delivered to your employer?
6. Is your business dependent on people gathering, such as in shops, entertainment centers, restaurants, hair/nail salons, or public transportation, to name a few? How long can the business survive without customers, and will you be paid if not working or there are no customers?
7. What if there is an interruption in the delivery of goods? Will you go to work and will you be paid?

Form neighborhood and community teams

Community planning for pandemic flu is a little different than natural disaster planning for floods, tornadoes, or hurricanes. In these cases, people tend to gather in community shelters and help one another.

It will be different with pandemic flu. Social distancing will be recommended, people will distance themselves from each other to avoid “the bug,” and thus there will be no gatherings of people or multiple community response to outbreaks.

But there will and must be planning.

“Social distancing” does not mean that communities and neighborhoods cannot gather and plan for pandemic flu. It just means that the planning parameters have changed.

In response to state summit conferences of experts, many communities have begun the process of developing community plans, and all states have plans. They can be found at

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/stateplans.html>

To get the ball rolling, call a neighborhood meeting or series of meetings. Talk about:

1. Your community and state plans. Consider such things as garbage disposal, law enforcement, fire protection, and medical services.
2. What will your schools do if an outbreak occurs or they are ordered to close?
3. What plans have the faith-based organizations in your community made for pandemic influenza?
4. What is each family doing to prepare and what resources and talents would they have to share should an outbreak occur?

5. Is there someone in your neighborhood who lives alone?
6. Is there anyone with special needs?
7. Is there a place where food, water, or emergency supplies can be stored?

Establish a neighborhood communication system to check on each other and include any emergency contact numbers for individuals and/or families. Should there be no phone service is there a place where a message board could be posted?

Though many will choose to stay home and remain socially distanced, some will want to volunteer and assist within the community. This is why it is important to know your community plan and where you may play an important volunteer role.

All individual, family, and community planning for pandemic flu or any disaster must be done before the disaster, and the plans must be tested and revised on a regular basis.

Look at it this way: This is one way—not the best way, but one way—to get to know your neighbors and community and to gain the satisfaction of knowing you’re doing your part in a team preparing for pandemic flu.

Extension Extras in this Pandemic Flu Preparation series:
ExEx13002, Hold family meetings
ExEx13003, Food and water supplies and storage
ExEx13004, If we don’t have utilities how do we cook, keep things clean?
ExEx13005, Saving up for an emergency
ExEx13006, The workplace and the community

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<http://agbiopubs.sdstate.edu/articles/ExEx13006.pdf>
or from the Extension Service Avian Flu/Pandemic Flu Information Website at
<http://sdces.sdstate.edu/avianflu/>

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