

Health experts and governments round the world are worried that the flu virus H5N1 affecting birds (avian influenza or bird flu) could change into a virus that easily affects people. If this happens, and the new virus enters New Zealand, many of us could become very sick.

When a new flu virus infects many people around the world, it is called an influenza pandemic.

Here are a few simple things you can do now to prepare for a pandemic.

Have a plan

Have a plan if you and your family have to stay at home for several weeks during a pandemic. Talk to your family and friends about their plans.

- Your plan needs to include who could help you with food and supplies if you and your family are ill. One way of doing this is by having a telephone network for you and the people who live close by.
- Have the phone number for your family doctor in a prominent place (eg, the fridge door).
- Think about an expanded emergency supplies kit. You can find a list of basic emergency kit contents on the inside back cover of the Yellow Pages. Or you could check the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management website on What To Do in a disaster.

Build up your emergency supplies kit

- Have a supply of food and drinks to last for at least a week. Choose non-perishable foods like canned foods, soup sachets and dried foods.
- Have extra paracetamol for all the family to help relieve aches and pains, and high temperatures. Remember not to give aspirin to children under 12. If you have prescription medicines (eg, for blood pressure), don't wait until you run out to get more. Consider putting some in your emergency supplies kit.
- Have tissues (or toilet paper) and plastic bags – supermarket bags are good – to put the used tissues into.
- You might want to include some masks, like some standard surgical masks from a pharmacy or the sort you get in a hardware store to protect yourself when sanding or using solvents. Clear advice on how best to use any masks safely and appropriately will be given at the beginning of a future pandemic. For example you might be advised to wear a mask if you get sick at work and need to travel home via public places. Masks should only be worn for short periods. They must be changed if they get wet from sneezing or coughing.
- Think about things to do if you and your family have to stay home for a couple of weeks (eg, books, games and videos).

Brush up on hygiene

- Washing and drying your hands properly is one of the best ways of protecting yourself against the spread of germs. Wash hands for at least 20 seconds with either soap or an alcohol-based rub. Drying well is just as important.
- The important times for washing and drying hands are **before** preparing food and eating, and **after** coughing or sneezing, blowing noses, wiping children's noses, visiting the toilet or looking after sick people.
- Keep your coughs and sneezes covered. Use tissues, and put them straight into a covered, lined rubbish bin.
- Try to stay a metre away from sick people to reduce the spread of illnesses.

Consider a flu jab

- Although it won't protect against new influenza viruses that could cause a future pandemic, ask your doctor to vaccinate you against the flu each year. Because the influenza virus changes frequently, you need to get vaccinated every year to stay immune.
- Vaccination is free for people aged 65 years and over, and adults and children with certain long-term (chronic) conditions. Your doctor will know if you are eligible for a free vaccination.

If you work from home or run your own business

- You need to think about how to keep your business running. You will find some suggestions on how to do this in the Business Planning Guide at http://www.med.govt.nz/irdev/econ_dev/pandemic-planning/business-continuity/planning-guide/
- You may want to talk to your insurance provider about your cover.

More information on influenza and planning for an influenza pandemic is available on <http://www.moh.govt.nz/pandemicinfluenza>