

## family checklist

Check the Civil Defence advice on the back cover of your phone book.

In addition to the recommendations around stores of food, water and emergency supplies:

- Your Pandemic Family Plan needs to take into account isolation could be the safest way to protect your family. Plan to be as self sufficient as possible.
- Stock up on canned non-perishable food, bottled water and cleaning/anti-bacterial products
- Update your first aid kit and essential prescriptions/medicines. Include paracetamol (for fever)
- Have on hand disinfectant or bleach to clean surfaces, handles, doorknobs
- Make sure you will be able to keep your bathroom as antiseptically clean as possible
- Use disposable gloves and cleaning cloths
- Have enough soap in the house – in the event of sickness in the household, you will want to be able to thoroughly wash and dry your hands frequently
- Plan to be able to stay home if you are sick and keep away from other people
- Keep coughs and sneezes covered. Tissues are best.
- Make sure you can stay informed, and will be able to listen to the radio, access the internet and watch the news for public announcements

what should people do at home to deal with an influenza pandemic?

- 1 stay home** *if you are sick*  
and keep away from other people – avoid visitors and visiting others.
- 2 wash and dry** *your hands thoroughly*  
(20 seconds) before handling food, after coughing, sneezing, using the bathroom, wiping or nose blowing (whether your nose or your child's), and when looking after sick people.
- 3 keep coughs and sneezes covered**  
Tissues are best. Put the tissue straight in a rubbish bin.
- 4 give plenty to drink**  
to people who have a fever and/or diarrhoea.
- 5 include paracetamol**  
(for fever) in your home emergency survival kit.



You may be hearing things about Avian Influenza (or Bird Flu) in the media, and maybe from family and friends.

There is concern from health authorities both here and abroad, and for good reason – history tells us that the world is overdue for a pandemic, and this avian influenza virus shows all the signs of having the potential to spark one.

Nobody can talk about Avian Influenza with any certainty – there are just too many variables, and nobody yet knows how or when or even if it may evolve into a form that could be easily transmissible between humans.

But there are enough signs that this disease has the potential to be a real threat, that it is prudent for all of us to start thinking about ways we can keep our families and ourselves safe.

Canterbury is fortunate to have dedicated and collaborative groups of family practice teams, both inside and outside of Pegasus Health, who are well used to working together in an effective manner. Our Christchurch health professionals have taken a proactive approach to avian flu – bringing together our general practices, pharmacies and community nurses along with the 24 Hour Surgery, Canterbury DHB and public health authorities.

This newsletter is designed to keep you informed with the latest news on Avian Flu, let you know what family practices are doing to prepare for a possible pandemic. It also tells you what you and your family can do to keep yourselves as safe as possible.

If you have any concerns or questions, please talk to your Pegasus family doctor or practice nurse. Additional information can be found online at [www.moh.govt.nz](http://www.moh.govt.nz).

Meantime, the best we can all do is to be as well prepared as possible, and go about our day-to-day lives with the knowledge that we are doing all we can.

**Dr Paul McCormack**  
Managing Director, Pegasus Health

## planning to keep your family safe

- The best protection you and your family have against any health emergency is good preparation. Talk with family and friends, neighbours, your family practice team and others about how you can prepare to keep your family as safe as possible.
- Nobody knows whether Avian Flu will evolve into a worldwide pandemic, but health experts here and abroad warn that it has the potential to do so. If it does, it could have a very serious impact on our communities and on health services as we know them.
- You need to ensure you and your family are as prepared as you can be to take care of sick family members at home, should hospitals and other health facilities be overwhelmed. While this is a worst-case scenario, it is always prudent to be prepared for any eventuality. Talk to your neighbours and others in your immediate area about how you might support one another if services are disrupted.
- Check the Civil Defence recommendations in your phone book. In addition to ensuring that sensible amounts of long-lasting food, fresh water and other essential items are available, personal preparation should include attention to stocks of medical and cleaning items, such as disinfectant.
- We also recommend people are up-to-date with their current flu vaccinations. This will ensure their immunity is not compromised and assist in identifying Avian Influenza infections should a local outbreak occur.

brought to you by...

This information is provided by your local doctors, nurses and primary health professionals from the following organisations:

Selwyn Rural Health, Christchurch South IPA, Papanui IPA, Southlink Health, Pacific Trust Canterbury, Pegasus Health, The 24 Hour Surgery, Nurse Maude and other community nursing agencies, Christchurch Pharmacists, Community and Public Health, Partnership Health PHO, Canterbury Rural PHO, Hurunui-Kaikoura PHO, Christchurch Community PHO.

## Q&As

(Source: Ministry of Health website, [www.moh.govt.nz](http://www.moh.govt.nz))

### Q What could a pandemic mean?

A pandemic could mean so many people are sick that it will affect workplaces, schools, hospitals and many other services. Some workplaces and schools may close.

Normal health and other services may not be available for several weeks. You may be asked to care for yourself and others at home.

There would be public announcements on TV, the radio and through other media channels that there is an influenza pandemic and information about what to do and where to go for help.

### Q How many people would die?

This is difficult to say because it depends on many factors, such as the severity of the pandemic and whom it affects most.

However, research published in the New Zealand Medical Journal earlier this year suggested a flu pandemic could result in the deaths of up to 3700 New Zealanders, with as many as 20,000 people requiring hospital care and just over one million people needing to see a health professional.

### Q How will the New Zealand health system cope with a pandemic?

There is no doubt that in a severe pandemic, hospitals and primary care practitioners, such as GPs and practice nurses, will find it difficult to deal with large numbers of people with the flu.

The Ministry of Health is considering and planning for other possible options such as community assessment centres for people with the flu.

People may also be asked to look after each other at home and be given information about how best to do so.

## about avian influenza

Avian Influenza is an infectious disease that doesn't normally infect species other than birds and pigs, but has, in some parts of the world, been transmitted from birds to humans.

The first documented infection of humans with an avian influenza virus occurred in Hong Kong in 1997, when the H5N1 strain caused severe respiratory disease in 18 humans, six of whom died.

Of the 15 avian influenza virus subtypes, H5N1 is of particular concern because it mutates rapidly and tends to acquire genes from viruses infecting other animal species.

The epidemic of highly pathogenic Avian Influenza caused by H5N1, which began in mid-December 2003 in the Republic of Korea and is now being seen in other Asian countries, is therefore of particular public health concern.

At the date of writing (September 2005), there were no documented cases of H5N1, in New Zealand. But public health officials are concerned that the spread of infection in birds increases the opportunities for direct infection of humans.

If more people become infected over time, the likelihood also increases that humans, if they are infected with human and avian influenza strains at the same time, could serve as a "mixing vessel" to create a new strain of the virus which could be transmitted from person to person.

Such an event would mark the start of an influenza pandemic. ■

## about influenza pandemics

**Based on historical patterns, influenza pandemics can be expected to occur, on average, three to four times each century when new virus subtypes emerge and are readily transmitted from person to person.**

However, the occurrence of influenza pandemics is unpredictable.

Although nobody can say when one might evolve, experts agree that another influenza pandemic is inevitable and possibly imminent.

The World Health Organisation will determine whether the virus is spreading in sufficient numbers to constitute a pandemic, at which point the New Zealand Government would lead a national response. ■

## Canterbury's Pandemic Planning Project

Canterbury's Pandemic Planning Team is working on contingency plans to keep primary care professionals working in the community as safe as possible, so primary care services are available in the event of a pandemic. While things are still very much in an assessment and planning stage, a serious pandemic would see major changes to the way primary care operates, and even where primary care services are available.

Canterbury's Pandemic Planning Team is headed by Dr Nigel Millar, Canterbury DHB Chief Medical Officer, and Dr Mel Brieseman, Canterbury's Chief Medical Officer of Health, and including representatives from the Canterbury District Health Board, Pegasus Health, primary care practitioners and public health professionals, who are currently preparing for any outbreak of Avian Influenza. This group is also coordinating its planning with the local Civil Defence and ECAN.

At the primary care level, Canterbury's city and rural general practices, Nurse Maude and other community nursing groups, local pharmacies, the 24 Hour Surgery, the PHOs and public health officials are also putting planning in place. ■

### Q How will we get treatment or health advice in a pandemic?

This will depend on the severity of the pandemic and how many people it affects. If you are sick you may be asked to phone your local doctor or nurse for advice, rather than visiting a waiting room and potentially spreading germs.

The Ministry of Health is also investigating the possibility of setting up community assessment centres, where people who are sick with influenza go to be assessed.

Many people may be asked to care for themselves and their family members at home.

### Q How will I know what to do in a pandemic?

There would be public announcements on TV, the radio and through other media channels, and regular updates using a variety of communications channels. ■

## about tamiflu

You may have heard about Tamiflu, which is an anti-viral antibiotic agent. We're completely unsure whether anti-viral agents like Tamiflu would be effective in the event of an Avian Influenza pandemic.

While there are no guarantees that anti-viral agents will work against pandemic influenza, there is still the possibility that it could end up being a very precious community resource. A concern is that people could take it at the wrong time or in a way that promotes resistance in the community, potentially rendering it ineffective for those who do need it and could benefit from it.

Despite the uncertainties about pandemic influenza, we DO know that the best thing we can all do to prepare our families in an emergency is to ensure good supplies of the essentials – long life food and water, essential household supplies, and in this instance, anything you need to take care of your family should usual health services not be available.

Tamiflu is being stockpiled at a national level by the government, and it is likely that these stocks will be targeted at healthcare professionals so they can continue to provide care to the whole community over a period of time. Stocks of Tamiflu are being distributed around the country for this purpose.

At this time it is up to individual doctors whether or not they prescribe Tamiflu for individual patients.

It can be difficult to understand if your doctor won't prescribe a course for you, that there is still a need to ensure anti-viral coverage will be available to front-line health workers for use later down the line. Canterbury's Pandemic Planning Team is clear that we do need to protect our doctors and nurses in order to provide a safe working environment and do all we can to keep them fit and well to care for you and your family. ■