

What is Avian Influenza?

A Fact Sheet*

By now you have probably heard about the H5N1 Avian, or “bird flu”, and the possibility that this virus may mutate enabling person-to-person transmission and a resultant world-wide outbreak, or pandemic.

While no H5N1 has been detected in the US and virtually all cases to date have been the result of close contact with infected birds, some experts believe we may be observing a pandemic in evolution. Thus, planning and preparation for a possible influenza pandemic has begun at the international, national, state, regional and local levels.

Because of the diffuse, simultaneous nature of a pandemic, local preparedness is most critical, right down to the level of individuals and households. To that end, this communication is intended to inform you about steps you can take to prepare yourself, your family, your neighborhood, and your workplace, as well as what is being done within your community, and at state and national levels. While there is no immediate threat of a pandemic, preparation at all levels is imperative and is underway and we will continue to keep you informed about steps being taken and things that you should consider in preparing for this potential public health threat.

Up-to-date information about avian influenza is available on the following websites: World Health Organization (www.who.int/en/), Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov/flu/avian), or Health and Human Services (www.pandemicflu.gov).

What Can YOU Do?

Stay Healthy – Avoid the Flu

- Wash your hands, often and thoroughly, with soap and warm water, or an alcohol-based lotion.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. This decreases the chance that you will infect yourself or others.

- Clean things at home, work or school that are touched often, like door or refrigerator handles, computer keyboards/mouse, phone and water faucets.
- Avoid physical contact with anyone who has cold or flu symptoms.
- Avoid large crowds and practice “social distancing” during contagious disease outbreaks. This is especially important for children, people who are chronically ill or with weakened immune systems, and their caregivers.
- Get an annual flu shot, even if you hear that the vaccine does not protect against bird flu. This is an easy and important way to take control of your own health. (A list of public clinics is available on line at flu.masspro.org)
- Ask your health care provider about getting a pneumococcal shot. You may need it if you are at high risk.

If You Get Sick

- When you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth with a tissue or the inside of your elbow (NOT your hand if you can help it). Never cough in the direction of someone else.
- Stay home when you are ill. If you have flu symptoms, stay home from work or school and avoid public activities for at least 5 days (7 days for children) or until all symptoms disappear.
- Contact your doctor or primary health care provider if you have specific questions about yourself or your family members.

More information on what you can do is available on websites of the state and federal government at www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/epii/flu/flu1.htm and www.pandemicflu.gov/planguide/checklist.html

What Can Your Family Do?

Being prepared for emergencies like a pandemic, or severe weather, or a terrorist attack, is one of the best ways to protect yourself and your family. Preparation gives you control should threats occur.

Checklists to help your family to plan for different types of emergencies are available at the following websites:

- Town of Hudson www.townofhudson.org.com (Fire Department page contains information in .doc and .pdf formats for use by individuals, families, businesses, schools, and agencies)
- American Red Cross - www.redcross.org
- Mass. Dept. of Public Health www.mass.gov/samh/

- Mass. Emergency Management Agency (search for "MEMA" on www.mass.gov)
- U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services www.pandemicflu.gov/planguide/checklist.html
- US Dept of Homeland Security www.ready.gov/america/index.html

Stay informed—Information Is Power

Additional information about possible threats and how to cope with these emergencies are available at the following Web sites:

- Federal Emergency Management Agency - www.fema.gov
- Mass. Dept. of Agricultural Resources - mass.gov/agr/animalhealth/bioterrorism/index.htm
- Mass. Medical Society - www.massmed.org
- Univ of Michigan Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy - www.cidrap.umn.edu
- USDHHS Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - www.bt.cdc.gov

Computers with Internet access are available for public use at the Hudson Public Library. Hudson Public Library is a good source of information about emergency planning and medical issues: www.hudsonpubliclibrary.com

What is Hudson Doing?

Hudson agencies have been preparing for a flu pandemic, including avian flu, by taking the following steps:

- Developing plans for Emergency Dispensing Sites for mass distribution and administration of vaccines and medications through the federal Strategic National Stockpile.
- Developing Continuity of Operations Plans for the Hudson Board of Health to maintain essential public health operations during an emergency.
- Beginning the process of organizing our own Hudson Medical Reserve Corps to provide volunteers to help during an emergency. (Details on volunteer efforts are available at the Board of Health, Fire Department, or on the Town Web site, www.townofhudson.org.)
- Working with other cities and towns within the region to develop Regional Comprehensive Emergency Operations Plans

- In addition to our annual flu vaccine clinics, we are in the process of setting up pneumococcal vaccine clinics before next flu season for Hudson seniors and other high risk residents.
- Working with the Hudson Fire Department on a Public Awareness and Education Campaign to help individuals, businesses, families, schools, and agencies plan for a variety of emergency situations. The information is available on the Town's Web site in the Fire Department pages. Call 978-562-5565 for more details.

*This material was prepared as part of the Public Awareness and Education Campaign of the Hudson Fire Department, with the assistance of Sam Wong, Hudson Board of Health.