

Dear Parents

We have been hearing a great deal in the media about avian flu and pandemic flu. This letter is intended to help you and your family understand what bird flu and pandemic flu are, as well as to help your family prepare for a possible flu pandemic. Let us begin with some definitions:

Seasonal flu (common flu) is a disease that causes fever, headache and tiredness in people. It can be spread easily from person to person. Seasonal flu happens every year during the winter months. Most healthy people who catch the flu will not get seriously ill. However, 36,000 Americans, primarily the very young/old or health compromised, die each year from seasonal flu and flu related complications. People can get flu vaccines to protect themselves from the seasonal flu.

Avian flu (bird flu) is a bird disease that is caused by flu viruses found naturally in birds. Bird flu viruses primarily infect birds and rarely cause sickness in people. Current outbreaks of deadly bird flu in many different parts of the world are caused by the H5N1 strain of bird flu virus. This virus has infected over 200 people worldwide (mostly in SE Asia) since 2003. Direct contact with infected poultry or contact with surfaces and objects contaminated by bird droppings are presently considered the main route of human infection. Very limited person-to-person spread has occurred among members of an Indonesian family. However, evidence indicates that the virus cannot be spread easily through causal contact. The H5N1 virus is not found in the US at this time. Even when the virus does appear here, it will not mean that we have a human flu pandemic. A flu pandemic is not the same thing as bird flu.

Pandemic flu describes a worldwide outbreak, or pandemic, of flu in people. Pandemic flu is caused by a new virus to which people have no immunity. As a result, the virus could cause large numbers of illness and deaths. A bird flu virus, or other non-human viruses, could serve as a precursor for human pandemic flu. A pandemic could happen if a virus such as a bird flu virus changes enough to be able to easily infect people and be spread easily among people. Although health experts are concerned, the H5N1 bird flu virus has not yet changed into a form that can cause a human flu pandemic. ***There is no human flu pandemic anywhere in the world at this time.***

Public health officials believe that a pandemic will happen in the future. The world has witnessed three flu pandemics during the 1900's (1918, 1959, 1968). The most deadly one was the 1918 pandemic flu, which may have killed over 50 million people worldwide. If another pandemic hits, the U.S. government expects 25% to 30% of the people in this country will be affected. Therefore it is very important that every one takes steps to prepare.

To help you, we have included the following with this letter:

(Note: the following materials can be downloaded from the County of San Luis Obispo Pandemic Flu Website

<http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/health/publichealth/commdisease/pandemicflu.htm>

1. Healthy Habits
2. Emergency Supplies Checklist
3. How to Take Care of Someone with Flu
4. *(Note: Any additional information your school/school district deems appropriate)*

In addition, we would also like to remind you to get annual flu vaccines for you and your children. Flu vaccines protect people from getting the seasonal flu. Seasonal flu vaccines do not provide protection against pandemic flu. However, seasonal flu can cause serious health problems for very young children, older adults, and people with pre-existing health problems.

Sincerely

Name of person preparing the letter

Title/Position

Date

Source: The above information was provided by and adapted from information provided by Washington County Department of Health and Human Services.