



# SO WHAT IS A FLU PANDEMIC, ANYWAY?

**It is getting pretty confusing.** We keep hearing about how a flu pandemic is likely. Then, the conversation turns to “swine flu” or “bird flu.” So what is the difference between regular flu and these other flu viruses, and why are people making a flu pandemic seem so scary?

An influenza pandemic occurs when a new or uncommon type of flu virus that our bodies are not protected against spreads around the world, causing mild to serious illness and possibly even death.

The flu shot that people are encouraged to get annually for seasonal flu will offer little or no protection against pandemic flu, since this is a different strain of virus.



Because our bodies may not have come across the virus that causes a pandemic, people may be able to catch it more easily from one another. Anyone who gets the pandemic virus may become much sicker than they would with seasonal flu.

Although people are used to flu season occurring at a certain time of year, a flu pandemic can happen anytime.

Every year, more than 200,000 people in the United States are hospitalized because of seasonal flu, and 36,000 people die from it. A flu pandemic can be much worse than that. Past flu pandemics have sent millions to the hospital and killed hundreds of thousands of people. It is definitely something that everybody needs to get ready for. The first step though, is for everyone, including our friends, families and colleagues to learn more about pandemic flu.



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