



# 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 bird flu. So what is the difference between regular flu and avian flu, and why are people making a flu pandemic seem so scary?

An influenza pandemic occurs when a new type of flu virus that our bodies are not protected against spreads around the world, causing 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, as this is a different strain of virus.

Because our bodies have not come across the virus that causes a pandemic, people can easily catch it from one another. Anyone who gets the new virus can become much sicker than they would for seasonal flu.



So, what is the link to birds? The flu that is currently causing concern is a strain that occurs primarily in poultry. It's also sickened other animals, including cats that have eaten birds. More troubling, though, is that this new type of bird flu has sickened people who are in close contact with birds, such as those that work and live on farms.

Right now, people cannot easily catch this bird flu from another person. But that could change if the virus mutates—causing the next flu pandemic.

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 hundreds of times worse than that. Past flu pandemics have sent millions to the hospital and killed hundreds of thousands in this country. It is definitely something that everybody needs to get ready for. The first step though, is for everyone, including our friends, families, and our mothers, to learn more about pandemic flu.

