
Pandemic Flu

SAN FRANCISCO CITY & COUNTY PREPAREDNESS



1. What is San Francisco doing to prepare for pandemic influenza?

San Francisco agencies are closely monitoring avian influenza and preparing for a pandemic in our region. A San Francisco City Department Avian/Pandemic Influenza Task Force is coordinating planning to ensure a multi-disciplined approach to continuity of operations. The health department is also reaching out to hospitals and clinicians, front line workers, businesses, organizations that meet the needs of special populations, and the general public. See our website for more information: www.sfdph.org/cdcp

2. Why is San Francisco preparing for pandemic influenza?

An influenza pandemic is a unique type of emergency. A pandemic has the potential to cause illness in a very large number of people which could overwhelm the health care system and cause high levels of absenteeism in every workforce including community services. A pandemic, could last from several months to two years with periods of illnesses increasing and decreasing sporadically.

3. Is San Francisco prepared to deal with the first human case?

Yes. City Departments are developing coordinated pandemic influenza plans to respond to one or many human cases. Health advisories with instructions for diagnosing, reporting, and treating patients have been sent to San Francisco clinicians, the health department's disease control team has been trained to evaluate suspect cases, and our public health lab is prepared to do initial testing for avian influenza.

4. Is the San Francisco Health Department's pandemic flu plan available to the public?

The Health Department is in the process of finalizing an existing pandemic flu plan which will be followed by a review process. The plan should be available to the general public by Winter 2006.

5. Who has the authority to declare a public health emergency?

The local health officer has broad powers to address a pandemic influenza emergency. Under California law, a local health officer who believes a contagious, infectious or communicable disease exists within the territory under his or her jurisdiction "shall take measures as may be necessary to prevent the spread of the disease or occurrence of additional cases" and to protect the public's health (California Health and Safety Code Section 120175).

6. Will bay area public health department responses be coordinated?

San Francisco is part of the Bay Area Regional Emergency Planning Project, bringing together 10 counties and 3 major cities to coordinate planning and response efforts for a variety of hazards. In addition, California uses the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) for disaster preparedness and response. The California Office of Emergency Services uses SEMS to facilitate mutual aid among cities and counties by defining a standard approach to requesting and sharing resources among jurisdictions.

7. How will the city share real time information?

During a pandemic real time information will be made available through press conferences, press releases to newspapers, TV stations, and radio, on our website (www.sfdph.org/cdcp), and through an information line (415-554-2905). Hospitals, clinics, and clinicians will receive Health Alerts with diagnosis, reporting, and treatment guidelines through emergency systems (e.g. EM System, Blast Fax, CAHAN). Information for the public will be coordinated through the Joint Information Center.

8. Will a quarantine be declared or isolation required?

A quarantine is when healthy people who have been around an infected person are asked to stay in one place. During the early stages of a pandemic, when there are just a few clusters of disease, some exposed people may be asked to remain in home quarantine for the time period required for symptoms to develop. The Health Department will most likely request that sick people remain in home isolation until they are symptom free. Sick people who must leave their home to visit a doctor will be asked to wear a mask.

9. Will public gatherings be canceled?

Some public gatherings may be postponed during a pandemic.

10. Will San Francisco public schools be closed during a pandemic?

Schools may close for short periods of time to slow the spread disease.

11. Will City Departments (e.g. transportation, police, and fire) be providing services during a pandemic?

Maintaining San Francisco city services is a priority during a pandemic. However, city departments may experience employee shortages due to ill staff. If so, city departments will operationalize emergency plans and prioritize essential services first. Standard services may be less regular than usual. Every effort will be made to notify the public of service changes.

12. Will hospitals be able to provide care for sick patients during a pandemic?

All San Francisco hospitals have surge capacity plans to deal with patient overflows. However, during a pandemic the Health Department may ask that non-essential health procedures be postponed and that individuals with mild illness recuperate at home. Family and community members may need to provide help to sick individuals if hospital bed space is limited.

13. Does San Francisco have a stockpile of masks or other protective equipment?

All San Francisco hospitals have stockpiles of masks and other personal protective equipment for health care practitioners. San Francisco has a stockpile of masks for emergency responders who would be in direct contact with sick or exposed people.

14. What can I do now?

Learn more about avian and pandemic influenza, how to prevent the spread of disease, and what to prepare for an emergency. Consider keeping a home supply of hand sanitizer and surgical masks. For details see: www.sfdph.org/cdcp and www.72hours.org.

This fact sheet will be updated as additional information is available.