

# Preparing for Pandemic Influenza

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During the 20th century there were three pandemics in the United States; the Spanish Flu, Hong Kong Flu, and the Asian Flu. Of those, the most severe, “Spanish flu”, occurred in 1918 with over 500,000 deaths in the United States and over 40 million individual deaths worldwide.

Pandemic influenza, (as opposed to seasonal influenza for which there is vaccination available and everyone has some basic immunity), is caused by a new strain of virus for which there is no immunization and no immunity. Presently, private drug companies are conducting research and development efforts to enhance production of a pandemic flu vaccine.

In order for pandemic influenza to occur there are four steps that must be in place:

1. Ability of virus to infect humans
2. No one has any immunity to the virus
3. Capable of causing disease in humans
4. Efficient human to human transmission

The current Avian Influenza virus or “bird flu” that is known as H5N1, which has spread throughout Asia, Europe and parts of Africa has met all of the steps except, efficient human to human transmission. For that reason there is some concern over this virus and the possibility of starting a pandemic.

The best way to prepare for pandemic influenza is to be informed and prepared. Beginning in April, the Southeastern District Health Department will be conducting public forums on pandemic influenza throughout the eight counties we serve. The forum schedule is as follows:

- April 4, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm – Malad – Oneida County Health Department
- April 5, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm – Arco – Butte School Auditorium
- April 11, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm – Blackfoot – Blackfoot High School Auditorium
- April 12, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm – American Falls – Old High School Band Room
- April 18, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm – Pocatello – Southeastern District Health Department
- April 19, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm – Fort Hall – Fort Hall High School
- April 25, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm – Preston – Veteran’s Room (behind the Health Department)
- May 2, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm – Soda Springs – County Extension Office Meeting Room
- May 3, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm – Montpelier, Oregon/California Trail Center

The Southeastern District Health Department (SDHD) has spent countless hours gathering and preparing information that is designed to educate the public, medical profession, and the media about Pandemic

Influenza. These forums are designed to answer questions about the probability of Pan Flu reaching the United States, signs and symptoms, what causes the illness, and how it is spread.

We believe our communities are on the front lines of a pandemic and will face many challenges in maintaining continuity of society in the face of widespread illness and increased demand on most essential government services. State and local responsibilities include ensuring that all reasonable measures are taken to limit the spread of an outbreak within and beyond the community's borders and integrating non-health entities in the planning for a pandemic, including law enforcement, utilities, city services and political leadership.

So please, mark your calendars now and plan on attending these very important forums. If you have any questions, or are unable to attend and would like more information, contact Wendi Lane, at 478-6303.