

Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr.  
Governor

Judith A. Monroe, M.D.  
State Health Commissioner



Indiana State  
Department of Health  
*An Equal Opportunity Employer*

## *Pandemic/Avian Influenza Q & A*

**Q: What is avian influenza and why are health officials concerned about it?**

A: Avian influenza is a serious flu virus that infects birds. When an avian virus transfers to humans, it seems to make humans sicker than a regular flu virus. The most severe past influenza pandemics may have been caused by strains of avian influenza that adapted to be able to infect humans and easily spread from person to person.

**Q: What is a pandemic?**

A: A pandemic occurs when a disease, such as influenza, affects the world. An epidemic affects only a community, state, or nation.

**Q: Why are health officials concerned now?**

A: A particular strain of avian influenza (H5N1) has become widespread in Asia, is spreading to birds in Eastern Europe, and has shown some capability to infect humans. More than 110 people in Asia have become infected with the H5N1 strain, and about half of those people have died. Influenza viruses can change, or “mutate,” over time, which may result in sustained spread from one person to another.

**Q: Is a vaccine available for this strain of influenza?**

A: Currently, there is no vaccine available to protect against the H5N1 strain of influenza in sufficient amounts to protect any segment of the population. It takes 6 to 8 months to produce a sufficient amount of influenza vaccine to meet the needs of a national vaccination program. Vaccine manufacturers have developed a vaccine based on the H5N1 strain and are working on producing the vaccine in limited quantities. National leaders, including President Bush, have met with drug manufacturers to urge their cooperation in producing vaccines and antiviral drugs in sufficient quantities to help protect the population.

**Q: Can antivirals help?**

A: There are antiviral medicines, such as Tamiflu, that seem to be effective against the H5N1 strain, but those antivirals are currently in limited supply and available only by prescription.

**Q: When will an influenza pandemic reach the United States?**

A: Unfortunately, it is impossible to predict when the virus will change so that it easily spreads from person to person or how long it would take to reach the U. S.

**Q: What are health officials doing to prepare for an influenza pandemic?**

A: Worldwide, health and agriculture officials are tracking the spread of the H5N1 strain in birds, are actively culling flocks, and are limiting the movement of poultry in an attempt to slow the spread of the disease. Health officials are also aggressively monitoring influenza-like illness in Asia to see if the H5N1 virus has changed in a manner that will allow person-to-person spread.

**Q: What has the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) done to prepare for an influenza pandemic?**

A: ISDH has been actively preparing for a possible influenza pandemic:

- State Health Commissioner Judith Monroe, M.D. formed a Planning Committee that has prepared a state influenza response plan and that will continue to monitor avian influenza developments. The Indiana Pandemic Influenza Response Plan is posted on the ISDH Web site ([www.IN.gov/isdh](http://www.IN.gov/isdh)).
- ISDH is working with local health departments, hospitals, and other agencies to develop more detailed response plans to help prepare the State of Indiana for a pandemic.
- ISDH has increased the number of physicians who are reporting influenza-like illnesses and submitting patient samples to the ISDH Laboratories to aid in identifying the occurrence of influenza in Indiana. This reporting is also now taking place year-round.

**Q: What can I do to be prepared for an influenza pandemic?**

A: Remember to practice basic hygiene:

- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- Use facial tissue instead of a handkerchief.
- Dispose of the tissue after use.
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly.
- Stay home if you are ill.

In the event of a pandemic or illness in your family, you may be asked to remain at home for a period of time. It is important that you have a supply of food, regular prescription medications and any over-the-counter medications you might need to treat colds or the flu, and other supplies that you may want/need. Think of this as what you would need to do if you were snowed in for a few days.

**Q: How will I know if a pandemic is likely?**

A: Several steps are being taken to ensure that the public is notified about the threat of a pandemic in a timely fashion:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is monitoring avian influenza in Asia and other affected areas and is routinely updating State Health Departments.
- Dr. Monroe is creating an advisory group to continue to monitor developments and recommend appropriate ISDH action.
- ISDH will provide updates on developments as necessary and explain actions being taken in response to those developments.

**Q: Should I still get an influenza vaccination this year?**

A: Yes. Even though the vaccine available is not based on the H5N1 virus, the vaccine will provide protection against other influenza strains that are known to infect humans and will probably be circulating this year.

For more detailed information about avian influenza, pandemics, and what you can do to help protect yourself and your family, please visit the ISDH Web page at [http://www.in.gov/isdh/healthinfo/influenza\\_index.htm](http://www.in.gov/isdh/healthinfo/influenza_index.htm) and/or the CDC Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/>.