

What is Portage County Health Department doing to Prepare for an Influenza Pandemic?

The Portage County Health Department works very closely with the City of Kent and the City of Ravenna Health Departments. We are developing a county wide Influenza Pandemic plan that includes working partnerships with all emergency responders in Portage County.

We are active in planning with Robinson Memorial Hospital, EMS, Fire, Police, Portage County Emergency Management Agency and County Coroner. There are many issues that need to be addressed during planning such as: How to handle large numbers of patients ill with a contagious disease? How to distribute medicines or vaccines to more than 150,000 residents of Portage County? What is the most effective way to provide education and information to the public? Should sick residents be quarantined? What is the best way to quickly identify an increased number of people ill with the flu?

Our county wide committee is working to address all of these questions. We have even tested some of our plans. The mass vaccination clinics held in 2004 and 2005 have helped us improve our efficiency in delivering flu vaccine to hundreds of residents.

Robinson Memorial Hospital and Portage County Health Department are working together to implement new programs to quickly identify spikes in illnesses. Early detection of influenza illness will be essential to preventing-spread of the disease.

Planning for Pandemic Influenza prepares us to respond to emergencies of all types

Pandemic Influenza

Why is Pandemic Influenza different than the regular flu?

Influenza virus change a little from one year to the next. This is why new flu vaccine is produced each year. A pandemic occurs when a totally new virus appears. Because no one has ever been exposed to the new virus, no one is protected from infection. Infection with the new virus spreads around the world and many people become sick and die. This is called a “pandemic.”

What is bird flu?

Bird flu is caused by influenza A viruses that occur naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide carry the viruses in their intestines but usually do not get sick from them. But bird flu spreads easily among birds and can kill domestic birds, such as chickens, ducks and turkeys.

Can bird flu spread to humans?

Infected birds shed flu virus in their saliva and feces. Almost all cases of bird flu in humans have resulted from direct contact with infected poultry or surfaces contaminated with their droppings. Spread of bird flu virus from one ill person to another has been reported very rarely in some Asian countries.

What is the connection between bird flu and pandemic influenza?

Since 1997, more than 200 people in 10 countries primarily in Asia have been infected with a new bird flu virus. This new virus has been quite dangerous, and half of the infected people have died. If this new flu virus changes or mutates and becomes easily spread from person to person, the result could be a worldwide pandemic with many deaths.

Will the seasonal flu vaccine I get every fall protect me from the bird flu?

No. There is no current **human** vaccine available for the bird flu but researchers are testing one.

Should I still get a regular flu shot this year?

Definitely yes. Regular flu is a serious illness and results in 200,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths in the U.S. each year. There is some speculation that antibodies for seasonal influenza may provide some protection but how much is not known at this time.

Is it safe to eat chicken, eggs and my Thanksgiving turkey?

Yes. Normal temperatures used for cooking kill the virus. Bird flu virus is not spread by fully cooked poultry or eggs.

How do I protect myself and my family?

Unfortunately there are no miracle cures, pills or shots. It falls back to the most important way we prevent the spread of disease. . . **WASH YOUR HANDS.** Cover your mouth. Use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. Do not go to public places if ill. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs are spread by touching an object that is contaminated. Plan for the emergency. See the family planning checklist on the panflu website a link is provided from our website.