

# PANDEMIC INFLUENZA AND INFECTIOUS DISEASE

## WHAT IT IS

A pandemic is a global communicable disease outbreak (whereas an “epidemic” is regional in nature or otherwise confined to particular populations). An influenza pandemic occurs when a strain of influenza virus emerges:

- Which causes serious illness.
- For which there is limited immunity in the human population.
- Which is able to easily and quickly spread person-to-person – especially through saliva, coughing, or sneezing.

Infectious diseases are one of the leading cause of death worldwide. Because of air travel and international trade, infectious disease agents are carried across borders every day by humans, animals, insects, and food products.

## WHAT TO DO

### Before (Preparedness/ Mitigation)

- Sign up for **Alert King County**.
- Get a yearly flu vaccine for everyone six months and older, unless a doctor advises against it.
- Wash or sanitize your hands often.
- Take common-sense steps to stop the spread of germs including covering coughs and sneezes and staying away from others as much as possible when you are sick.
- Wash and sanitize household items often.
- Practice good health habits, including eating a balanced diet, exercising daily, and getting sufficient rest.
- Periodically check your regular prescription drugs to ensure a continuous supply in your home.
- Have any nonprescription drugs and other health supplies on hand, including pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines, fluids with electrolytes, and vitamins.
- Get copies and maintain electronic versions of health records from doctors, hospitals, pharmacies and other sources and store them, for personal reference.
- Refer to “Medical Emergency,” below.

## KEY TERMS

- ▶ **Influenza** (flu) is a respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus that affects millions of people each year. Different strains have widely variant characteristics in terms of virulence, communicability, and population impacts. Flu virus also has the capacity to rapidly mutate and cross to and from multiple species.
- ▶ **Nonpharmaceutical Interventions** (NPIs) are actions, apart from getting vaccinated and taking medicine, which people and communities can take to help slow the spread of respiratory illnesses, like pandemic flu. Many NPIs are provided below, in the list of “What to do: Before.”

### During (Response)

- Listen to official information.
- If you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash or sanitize hands often.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- If you have a fever, make sure you are fever-free for 24 hours before you return to work and school.

### After (Recovery)

- Clean surfaces such as counters, doorknobs, fixtures, phones, remotes, and linens.
- Common household cleaning products can kill the flu virus, including products containing:
  - Chlorine
  - Hydrogen peroxide
  - Detergents (soap)
  - Iodine-based antiseptics
  - Alcohols