

Avian Influenza

How to Prepare for “Sheltering-In-Place”

Health professionals are concerned that the continued spread of a highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1) virus among animals in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe has the potential to significantly threaten human health. If a virus such as H5N1 mutates and spreads easily from one person to another, avian influenza may break out globally. While there are **no reports of sustained human-to-human transmission** of avian influenza, the U.S. government and international health agencies are preparing for a possible pandemic.

Depending on the severity of a pandemic, commercial airlines might drastically curtail or even cease operations. Travel restrictions could also impede people from returning to the United States or fleeing to other countries. For these reasons, it may make more sense to “**shelter-in-place**” (i.e., stay home and practice “social distancing” to avoid contagion) for an appropriate period of time.

United States Residents: The Department of Health and Human Services suggests that **US residents** prepare **two weeks** of emergency supplies (food, water, medicines, etc.) in order to **shelter-in-place** during an influenza pandemic.

American Citizens Abroad: Due to varying conditions overseas, **Americans abroad** should evaluate their situation and prepare emergency supplies accordingly (nonperishable food, potable water, medicines, etc.) for the possibility of **sheltering-in-place** for **at least two** and **up to twelve weeks**. Water purification techniques such as boiling, filtering and/or adding chlorine to locally available rainwater, swimming pools, lakes, rivers and wells may replace the need to store large quantities of water.

What can you do on a daily basis? Cover your cough. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds to eradicate viruses **and** bacteria or apply a hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol content when soap and water are not available. Stay home if you are sick. Vaccinate yourself against seasonal flu.

Travel: American citizens living in or traveling to countries with human or animal cases of H5N1 virus should consider the **potential risks**. Keep informed of the latest medical guidance and practical information and plan accordingly. Consult www.travel.state.gov for the latest tips on international travel.

On-Line Resources: Detailed information about suggested preparations, as well as planning checklists, are available on the U.S. government’s one-stop web site on pandemic influenza (www.pandemicflu.gov), also the World Health Organization (www.who.int/en/) and the Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) websites.