It’s Not Flu as Usual

A Healthcare Worker’s Guide to:

Brevard County Hospitals’ Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan
One successful way to prepare for any uncertainty is with proper planning. Worldwide, public health officials and our fellow healthcare workers have learned many lessons from the SARS epidemic, and these experiences have helped all Brevard hospitals work together to develop a successful plan to respond to a possible pandemic flu event in our community. We believe this plan will help us be prepared to meet the needs of all Brevard County residents.

Health First, Parrish Medical Center, and Wuesthoff Health System, in cooperation with the Brevard County Emergency Management Office and the Brevard County Health Department, have collaborated to establish a singular plan to assist our healthcare employees prepare for a possible pandemic flu. This plan makes us more effective in our response if a pandemic flu event were to occur in Brevard County. In It’s Not Flu as Usual: A Healthcare Worker’s Guide to Brevard County Hospitals’ Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan, we have outlined policies, plans, and procedures for meeting the challenge of a pandemic flu outbreak in our community.

Your participation is essential to our success. We will make every attempt to accommodate employee’s personal needs whenever possible. It will be important to remain flexible as the intensity and length of a flu occurrence will be unknown. If you have questions specific to your job, please contact your department management team for additional information that relates to your role if a pandemic flu event were to occur.

Please take the time to read the information provided so you can be prepared if and when a pandemic flu outbreak arrives. We know that by working together, we can be successful in minimizing the impact a pandemic event would have on our communities.

For additional information on pandemic flu, you can visit the following Web sites:

- www.pandemicflu.gov

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Introduction

A pandemic event occurs when a disease breaks out all over the world. A flu pandemic occurs when a new influenza or flu virus begins to spread. Because people have little or no natural immunity to a totally new strain of influenza and there is no vaccine available, the disease can spread easily from person to person. It causes serious illness, and can sweep around the world in a very short time.

It is difficult to predict when the next influenza pandemic might occur or how severe it would be. Wherever and whenever a pandemic starts, everyone around the world is at risk. Countries can sometimes slow down the arrival of the virus by closing their borders or restricting travel through their borders, but this will not stop its arrival.

“…there is no influenza pandemic in the world at this time…”

Although there is no influenza pandemic in the world at this time, Brevard County has developed a detailed Pandemic Flu Plan that will help us be prepared to care for our community’s health care if a flu pandemic were to happen here. Healthcare providers will play a very important role during a pandemic flu event. This brochure is designed to help you understand your role and responsibilities in our Pandemic Flu Plan.

Definitions

Seasonal (or Common) Flu is a respiratory illness that can be transmitted person to person. Most people have some immunity to seasonal flu and a vaccine is available.

Avian (or Bird) Flu is caused by a virus that occurs naturally among wild birds. There is more than one variety of this flu strain. The one you hear the most about is sometimes called the “H5N1” variety, which is deadly to domestic birds. All types of birds can carry the virus but outbreaks occur most often in chickens and turkeys. The infection may also be carried by migratory wild birds, which can carry the virus but show no signs of disease. Humans are only rarely infected with this strain of the flu virus.
Current Pandemic Influenza Status

Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)
Avian influenza is an infection caused by flu viruses that are present naturally among birds. Wild birds worldwide carry the virus in their intestines, but usually do not get sick from it. However, bird flu is very contagious among birds and can make some domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks, and turkeys, very sick and can kill them. Bird flu viruses do not usually infect humans, but some rare cases have occurred since 1997.

There are many different varieties of the bird flu virus and all known varieties of the virus can be found in birds. The current outbreak among poultry in Asia and Europe is caused by a H5N1 variety of the bird flu virus.

What is the risk to humans from bird flu?
The risk from bird flu for most people is generally low because the viruses occur mainly among birds and usually do not infect humans. However, during an outbreak of bird flu among poultry (domesticated chickens, ducks, or turkeys), there is a possible risk to people who have contact with infected birds or surfaces that have been contaminated with the waste products of infected birds.

Pandemic Flu
So far, spread of the H5N1 bird flu virus from person to person has been rare and has not continued beyond one person. However, because all flu viruses have the ability to mutate, scientists are concerned that the H5N1 virus could become able to infect humans and spread easily from one person to another. Because these viruses do not commonly infect humans, there is little or no immune protection against them in the human population. If the H5N1 virus were able to infect people and spread easily from person to person, a flu pandemic could begin.

No one can predict when a pandemic might occur. However, experts from around the world are watching the H5N1 bird flu situation in Asia very closely and are preparing for the possibility that the virus may begin to spread more easily and widely from person to person.

Pandemic Flu Alert System
The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed an alert system to help inform the world about the seriousness of a pandemic (see box). The alert system has six phases, with Phase 1 having the lowest risk of human cases and Phase 6 posing the greatest risk of a pandemic flu outbreak among people.

The world is presently in Phase 3 of the Pandemic Alert. This means that there is a new influenza virus variety that is causing disease in humans, but is not yet spreading easily from person to person.

Pandemic Flu Plan Summary
As a flu pandemic develops, our efforts to contain its spread will become stricter and more extensive. If the pandemic event becomes more widespread or severe, the Alert Level will be elevated.

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<th>WHO Phase</th>
<th>Alert Level</th>
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World Health Organization (WHO) Pandemic Influenza Alert System

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<th>Pandemic Phase</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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<tr>
<td>Inter-pandemic</td>
<td>1 New virus in animals, no human cases. Low risk of human cases</td>
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<td>2 Higher risk of human cases</td>
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<td>Pandemic Alert</td>
<td>3 New virus causes human cases. No or very limited human-to-human transmission</td>
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<td>4 Evidence of increased human-to-human transmission</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5 Evidence of significant human-to-human transmission</td>
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<td>Pandemic</td>
<td>6 Efficient and sustained human-to-human transmission</td>
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We will also conduct a complete review of our efforts to keep the pandemic under control in meetings with public health and emergency management authorities. The following outline provides a list of steps that may be taken at each Alert Level. These actions may be changed as the pandemic changes.

**Phase 6, Level A**
- All staff will wear a designated mask within 3 feet of any patient.
- Airborne and contact precautions will be taken for all patients who have a fever and a new cough, and these patients will continue to be evaluated.

**Phase 6, Level B**
- All staff will wear designated masks at all times and practice good hand hygiene while in the facility.
- Consider opening a “Fever Clinic” for daily screening of all staff and visitors who enter the facility.
- Establish pandemic influenza triage.
- Direct all patients through designated facility entry points.
- Establish separate waiting areas for persons who have symptoms of the flu.
- Begin a phone triage system to discourage unnecessary visits to the Emergency Department and other outpatient departments.
- Evaluate all patients for fever.
- Ask each patient: “Do you have a new cough that has developed in the last 10 days?”
- Patients without fever and/or cough should be directed to the “Non-Influenza” cohort or group and managed in the usual manner.
- Patients with fever and/or cough should be directed to the “Suspect-Influenza” cohort or group.
- Provide patients with fever and/or cough with an appropriate mask and/or facial tissues.
- Place all Suspect-Influenza patients on airborne and contact precautions.

**Phase 6, Level C**
- All staff will wear designated masks at all times and practice good hand hygiene while in the facility.
- Open a “Fever Clinic” for daily screening of all staff and visitors who enter the facility.
- Continue pandemic influenza triage system.
- Airborne and contact precautions will be taken for all Suspect-Influenza category patients and in addition to continued evaluation.
- Volunteers and relief teams will be activated. Non-clinical nursing staff will prepare to assist in providing health care.
- Clinical nursing staff from outpatient sites that have closed will prepare to assist in providing health care.
- The hospitals will “lock down” and control visitor access.
- Limit number of visitors to only those that are essential for patient support, such as immediate family members.
- Limit points of entry to the hospital and assign clinical staff to screen all visitors to facility.
- Recruit volunteers from the community (for example, retired nurses and physicians, and clinical staff working in outpatient settings).
- The Suspect-Influenza and Confirmed-Influenza cohorts or groups may be merged.

**Phase 6, Level D**
- All staff will wear designated masks at all times and practice good hand hygiene while in the facility.
- Continue operation of the “Fever Clinic” for daily screening of all staff and visitors who enter the facility.
- Consider suspending non-acute care services such as elective surgery.
- Continue pandemic influenza triage system.
- Place all Suspect-Influenza category patients on airborne and contact precautions and continue to evaluate these patients.
- Assume patients arriving with influenza-like illness are “Confirmed-Influenza” patients.
- The Suspect-Influenza and Confirmed-Influenza cohorts or groups may be merged.

**Phase 6, Level E**
- All staff will wear designated masks at all times and practice good hand hygiene while in the facility.
- Continue operation of the “Fever Clinic” for daily screening of all staff and visitors who enter the facility.
- Discontinue non-acute care services such as elective surgery.
- Continue pandemic influenza triage system.
- Place all Suspect-Influenza cohort patients on airborne and contact precautions and continue to evaluate these patients.
- Assume patients presenting with influenza-like illness are confirmed influenza patients.
- The Suspect-Influenza and Confirmed-Influenza cohorts or groups may be merged.

**Pandemic Flu and Treatment and Vaccines**
Recommendations for antiviral treatments and vaccines are subject to change. Availability of antivirals and vaccines is uncertain. When and if they become available, they will be provided according to priority groups by recommendations from federal and state organizations.

**Isolation Precautions**
Patients who are suspected or confirmed to have the pandemic influenza strain should be placed on modified-airborne and contact isolation precautions. Modified-airborne and contact isolation includes the following:
- Patients must be placed in a private, negative pressure room with the doors closed, if available. Patients may be cohorted.
- Gowns and gloves are required to enter room.
- A designated mask and protective eyewear are required for entry into the room.
- An N95 mask is required for aerosol prone procedures including: Ventilator/trach care (e.g.; intubation, extubation and suctioning)
- Nasogastric (NG) tube insertion or removal
Planning for the Pandemic Flu

Preplanning, alternative options and preparation are critical to meet a pandemic challenge without compromising the needs of the community we serve. Hospital employees are expected to plan and prepare to meet their obligations as healthcare providers. Please contact a Human Resources representative at your particular facility to review the policies that have been developed to assure that our patients and community needs are met while allowing you to meet family responsibilities during a pandemic event.

It is difficult to predict when the next influenza pandemic will occur or how severe it will be. Therefore, our Pandemic Flu Plan must be flexible. The Plan may be changed depending on the attack rate and severity of the disease. In addition, the Plan may be changed depending on the availability of specific treatment and vaccines.

Education
The time to discuss pandemic flu preparedness and communicate our Pandemic Flu Plan with all employees should occur before the start of the annual flu season, usually in October–November. Additionally, all new employees will receive information on pandemic flu preparedness during the hiring process, at new hire orientation, during their department or unit orientation, and at the start of the annual flu season each year.

Childcare Planning
Early in a pandemic flu event, the public health department may recommend that schools and day care facilities be closed. This will make it very difficult for employees with children to come to work. Please plan now for alternative childcare arrangements so you can meet your obligations at work. Some tips for alternative childcare include:
• Make arrangements with a family member or friend.
• Plan for childcare within the neighborhood.
• Make arrangements with friends whose place of employment may close.
• Share childcare with associates who work on alternate shifts.

Pandemic Flu Staffing
Every hospital staff member (clinical and non-clinical) is considered to be a necessary member of the staff to be utilized in the Pandemic Flu Plan. Employees are required to wear their identification badges and will be asked to show them when entering or exiting their hospital and/or facility.

Working through Pandemic Flu
We understand that healthcare workers may be anxious and even fearful about working during a pandemic flu event. We all must remember that our mission is to care for our community’s healthcare needs in the event of a flu pandemic. We are committed to protecting our employees’ health and safety at all times. We will take the following precautions to protect the health of our employees:
• Provide appropriate personal protective equipment such as masks, gowns, and gloves.
• Increase the supply of critical items on hand to ensure continued availability during a pandemic.
• Implement daily Fever Clinics for screening of all staff and visitors who enter the hospital and/or facility.
• Implement hospital “lock down” and control visitor access as needed.
• Limit number of visitors.
• Provide vaccinations and treatments as they become available.

Your Family Pandemic Flu Plan
As a healthcare worker you should try to be well informed about pandemic flu and the steps you can take to protect yourself and your family. This checklist will help you gather the information and resources you may need at home in case of a flu pandemic.
• Store a two-week supply of water and food. During a pandemic, if you cannot get to a store, or if stores are out of supplies, it will be important for you to have extra supplies on hand. This can be useful in other types of emergencies, such as power outages and disasters.
• Regularly check your 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.
• Talk with family members and loved ones about how they will be cared for if they get sick, or what will be needed to care for them in your home.
• Volunteer with local groups to prepare and assist with emergency response.
• Get involved in your community as it works to prepare for an influenza pandemic event.

Four Simple Things You Can Do To Protect Yourself and Your Family

1. SHIELD YOUR COUGHING AND SNEEZING
• Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue.
• Put used tissues in the trash can.
• If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.

2. WASH YOUR HANDS!
• Wash hands with warm, soapy water for at least 10–15 seconds OR use a hand sanitizer after:
  • Coughing or sneezing.
  • Using the bathroom.
  • Caring for a sick person.
  • Handling garbage or animal waste.

3. KEEP LIVING AND WORK AREAS CLEAN
• Clean areas with household detergents (dishwashing liquid, laundry detergent, or hand soap).
• Sanitize surfaces with bleach or alcohol.

4. KEEP YOUR DISTANCE
• Avoid crowds.
• Limit your travel.
• Travel to and from work during off-peak hours, if possible.
• Work from home, if possible.
Conclusion

As a healthcare worker, you are an integral part of a coordinated effort during any communitywide emergency, including a possible pandemic flu event. Your help will ensure that our community is well cared for. Thank you for understanding your role in the event of an influenza pandemic event.

Our Partners

[Logos and names of organizations]