



# Pandemic Flu: A Guide for Families with Allergies and Asthma

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First in a series of articles, alerts and special publications for AANMA members.

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**V**ery few animal diseases infect humans, but several strains of avian influenza (or bird flu) viruses have. One particular strain has scientists and health officials most worried: H5N1, which has caused the most detected cases of severe respiratory disease and death in humans.

Although total reported cases of human infection with the H5N1 virus are low (228 cases worldwide since 2003, including 130 deaths), governments and health agencies around the world are concerned that could change. They believe it may be just a matter of time until this virus mutates to one that's easily and sustainably passed person-to-person.

When that happens, infection rates are projected to skyrocket because humans have no natural immunity. At that time it will become an avian *flu pandemic*.

According to the World Health Organization, if the avian flu becomes pandemic, it will likely

encircle the entire globe within three months. How long it may take to infect your community – and how long it will stay – is impossible to estimate. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says the first stage of a pandemic will last six to eight

weeks, followed by waves of illness lasting two to three months.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services tells us that no vaccines will be available during the first six to eight months of a flu pandemic because scientists will not have the profile of the virus until it occurs.


Businesses, economies, and government and local health services will be affected. Access to medical care and medications will not be certain . . . and people with chronic health conditions

like asthma and COPD are at special risk.

Start preparing today for tomorrow's pandemic flu. AANMA's *Live Smarter, Not Harder Challenge* shows you how.

## Flu Factoid

Most healthy adults  
are contagious  
to others  
**1 DAY BEFORE**  
symptoms develop  
and up to  
**5 DAYS AFTER**  
becoming sick.



# Protect Prepare Preempt

## Your Guide to Pandemic Flu

### Protect

Protect against pandemic flu by practicing good health habits. Update your asthma and allergy treatment plan with your healthcare provider. Exercise, get enough sleep, eat a well-balanced diet, and minimize exposures to allergens, irritants and – most important – viruses!

**Visit your pediatrician or family physician for a checkup.**

- Talk about ways to protect yourself from pandemic and seasonal flu.
- Ask about actions to take at the first sign of flu symptoms.
- Ask to be notified as soon as seasonal flu vaccines arrive.



**Visit your asthma specialist.**

- Update your asthma management plan.
- Make the switch to HFA-propelled bronchodilator inhalers now (Ventolin® HFA, Proventil® HFA, Xopenex HFA™, ProAir™ HFA).
- Ask about medications to keep in stock at home, such as oral and inhaled bronchodilators and corticosteroids, auto-injectable epinephrine, antihistamines or decongestants.
- Discuss proper use of medications to avoid side effects.

**Mask the problem.**

- Use an N95 face mask (also called a respirator) to help keep flu-laden droplets out of your airways or to prevent sharing your germs with others.
- Look for masks that are fluid resistant and adjust to your face shape. Not sure whether a mask at your local store is what you need? Look it up on a list of N95 respirators certified by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/topics/respirators/disp\\_part/n95list1.html](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/topics/respirators/disp_part/n95list1.html).

**Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.**

- A tissue is ideal, but if you don't have one when you're out in public, cough or sneeze into your sleeve or shoulder.
- Consider carrying Ziploc® baggies to hold used tissues until you can dispose of them.

# Prepare

When your family is living with allergies, asthma or COPD, being prepared is always a good idea. Keep records of your family's medical history on hand, inspect medications and medical devices, and be prepared for an extended stay at home (possibly without water and electricity).

- Make note of your family's medical needs.**  
In cases of pandemic flu outbreak, communities could set up mass vaccination clinics or alternative medical care centers.
  - Have medical history readily available for all family members.
  - Visit [www.pandemicflu.gov/planguide/checklist.html](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/planguide/checklist.html) to print a Family Emergency Health Information Sheet and an Emergency Contacts Form.
- Inspect nebulizers and nebulized medications.**
  - Make sure your nebulizer is in good working condition and that you have sufficient supplies of disposable and reusable parts.
  - Use only FDA-approved medications in your nebulizer.
- Stock your pantry.** From granola to garbage bags, CDC has a list of suggested pantry supplies at [www.pandemicflu.gov/planguide/checklist.html](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/planguide/checklist.html). This is even more important if someone in your family has food allergies.
  - Buy commercially bottled water and keep it in the original container until you're ready to drink it. According to the American Red Cross, a typical person needs at least two quarts (or half a gallon) of water each day. People in hot environments, children, nursing mothers and people who are ill need even more.
  - Check expiration dates on what's already in your pantry and follow the practice of first-in, first-out to keep your supply fresh.



# Current Events

## MDI Transition

Metered-dose inhalers are changing – and so are patient treatment plans.

Patients using albuterol metered-dose inhalers (MDIs) are facing an unprecedented requirement: They have to switch from inhalers using CFC propellants to new versions using HFA propellants. This isn't a random event – it's part of an international treaty to protect the earth's atmosphere.

**A global health crisis like pandemic flu may occur during the MDI transition.** Supplies of the CFC MDIs are scheduled to decline as HFA MDI production increases. If a pandemic flu hits, people with asthma and COPD won't be the only ones who need inhaled medications. The lifesaving medications you need may be in even shorter supply.

### **ACTION:**

Make the transition to new inhalers now. Keep refills current.

## Illegal Nebulizer Medications

Increasingly, and without their knowledge, patients are being exposed to health risks associated with unlawfully manufactured nebulizer medications.

Is the medication in your nebulizer FDA-approved as safe, effective and sterile? Even if you're not on nebulizer medications now, you could be during a health crisis like pandemic flu.

### **ACTION:**

Ask your doctor to write "Do Not Compound This Nebulizer Medication" on your prescription and mark "No Substitutions."

Check your nebulizer medication before you use it to be sure it's FDA-approved. See AANMA's "Are There Fakes and Frauds in Your Nebulizer?" article ([www.breatherville.org/pdf/pu\\_fakes\\_frauds.pdf](http://www.breatherville.org/pdf/pu_fakes_frauds.pdf)).

## Health Insurance Policies

Many health insurance plans limit patients to 30 days' worth of a prescription medication and won't reimburse you for orders above that amount. When pandemic flu hits the United States, asthma, allergy and COPD medications will be harder to come by – and you'll have to stand in line at the pharmacy with lots of sick people!

### **ACTION:**

Talk to your insurance provider to see what you can do to stock up on medications now.



## Preempt

The common flu virus is primarily spread by airborne droplets that reach the eyes, nose or mouth. It can also be spread by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your face. Pandemic flu is expected to spread the same way.

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and hot water**, particularly after you cough or sneeze.
  - Suds up for at least 20 seconds to be sure the soap does its job.
  - If you have eczema, follow with a hand cream to seal your skin and keep out viruses and germs.
- Keep your nose clear.** Your nose is the first line of defense against inhaled viruses and allergens, so help nasal passages work their best.
  - Do daily nasal washes of kosher salt, baking soda and distilled water, use premixed packets, or use saline nasal sprays. You can find a nasal wash recipe in AANMA's "Sinuses 101" College Course at [www.breatheville.org](http://www.breatheville.org).
- Wash or spray the telephone with a disinfectant daily** and keep keyboards (a major source of germs at schools and offices) and other electronic equipment clean.

## Flu Terms To Know

**Seasonal flu** is transmitted person-to-person. There are different types of influenza viruses. Most people have some immunity to viruses, and vaccines are available.

**Avian (or bird) flu** occurs naturally among wild birds. The H5N1 variant is deadly to domestic fowl (like chickens and turkeys) and in recent cases has been transmitted from birds to humans. There is no natural human immunity and no human available vaccine.

**Pandemic flu** is a global outbreak of flu disease that occurs when a new type of influenza virus appears that people have not been exposed to before (or have not been exposed to in a long time). The virus spreads quickly from person to person. For the past 10 years, scientists have been alerting government health departments to prepare for another pandemic. Statistically we are overdue, and scientists believe it is just a matter of time until the next influenza pandemic occurs.

## Pandemic Flu Resources

- Up-to-date flu information: [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov) (also accessible through [www.avianflu.gov](http://www.avianflu.gov))
- Background information: [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)
- Flu vaccine information: [www.fda.gov/cder/drug/antivirals/influenza](http://www.fda.gov/cder/drug/antivirals/influenza)
- Global Information: [www.who.int/csr/disease/avian\\_influenza/en](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en)



**Allergy & Asthma Network**  
Mothers of Asthmatics

AANMA formed an advisory board to address pandemic flu issues specific to asthma, allergies and COPD. AANMA members will automatically receive influenza and pandemic flu news via *Allergy & Asthma Today*, *The MA Report*, e-mail alerts and special publications.

**Is your AANMA membership up to date?  
Call 800.878.4403 to renew and continue  
receiving vital news updates from AANMA.**