

Pandemic Flu

Act Now

FLU

Flu is an infection of the respiratory tract (air passage) caused by a virus. There are many kinds of flu. Often, people get flu during the cold season, but seasonal flu is usually mild and does not cause much harm.

ROUTES OF FLU INFECTION

Flu is transmitted from one person to another through droplets released from an infected person during spitting, coughing, sneezing, and talking. The droplets can go as far as one metre away. The viruses in the droplets remain alive for several hours on hard surfaces, such as tables, door handles, telephones, clothing, paper and key boards. People pick up the viruses when they come in contact with the contaminated surfaces, and the viruses get into their bodies when they touch their noses, mouths and eyes with contaminated hands. Flu viruses also get into the body through breathing in air contaminated with flu viruses.



WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF FLU?

Flu may cause fever, a runny nose, cough, sore throat, headache, body aches, chills, body weakness and even diarrhoea and vomiting.

IS FLU A SERIOUS DISEASE?

Most types of flu are mild and last only a short time and clear without treatment. But some kinds of flu can be very serious, and can even kill. In the past, flu epidemics have killed people on a large scale. The Spanish Flu of 1918, the Asian Flu of 1957 and the Hong Kong Flu of 1968 killed many people.

WHAT IS THE SITUATION TODAY?

Today we have two kinds of flu that are threatening the world – bird flu (H5N1) and the H1N1 flu. WHO has declared H1N1 a pandemic.

From the year 2003, when the first case of bird flu was reported, to January 28, 2010, 15 countries had recorded 471 laboratory confirmed cases of H5N1. Out

of these, 282 had died of the disease. By January 31, 2010, H1N1 had affected more than 209 countries which had jointly recorded more than 600,000 laboratory confirmed cases. A total of 15,174 of these patients had died of the disease. By November 30, 2009, 37 African countries had recorded a total of 22,164 laboratory confirmed cases of the H1N1 flu, with 138 deaths.

The two flus are spreading and have the capacity to explode into full blown pandemics. But because of the concerted response mounted worldwide, the flus have not spread as fast as pandemic flus of the past. The world has, however, been warned, and the slow spread has provided an opportunity for action to stop the flus and avert their effects. We should grab the opportunity and ACT NOW.

WHAT ACTION DO WE NEED TO TAKE?

Each country needs to do the following to protect the people from bird flu and the H1N1 flu:

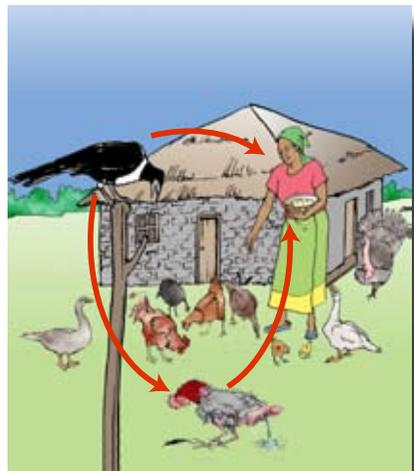
- Leaders need to know the facts about the bird flu and the H1N1 flu.
- Countries need to develop plans for flu prevention and mitigation.
- Countries need to develop institutional capacity to implement activities to prevent and contain the flus.
- Countries need to empower their people to act to prevent and contain the flus .
- Leaders need to make available the resources needed to carry out flu preventive and containment activities

KEY FACTS ABOUT BIRD FLU and H1N1

Facts about bird flu

Bird flu is a disease that usually infects birds, but can also infect people. It is caused by the H5N1 virus. People get bird flu through:

- Close contact with infected chickens and other birds.
- Contact with blood and fluids from infected birds during slaughtering and preparing chicken for cooking.
- Eating contaminated poultry and poultry products that are not cooked well.
- Breathing in air with bird flu viruses.





Bird flu is a serious disease, and 60% of the people who have been infected since it broke out in Asia in 2003 have died. So far bird flu has occurred on a relatively small scale in the areas where it has occurred. But it has become endemic in some of these areas, including some African countries, from where it could spread more widely. Were it to occur on a large scale, bird flu would lead to mass deaths of birds and human beings. Many people would die and the poultry industry would collapse, leaving the many families that depend on it destitute.

Facts about H1N1

H1N1 is an infection of the respiratory tract (air passage) caused by the H1N1 virus. Although it was initially called “swine” flu, the disease does not come from pigs and is not spread by pigs. So it is safe to eat pork and pork products which have been prepared in a clean way and cooked well.

The H1N1 flu is transmitted from person to person in the same way as the common flu. Since it was first detected in Mexico and the United States in March and April of 2009, it has spread quickly. Because of the high mobility of people throughout the world, even the countries that have not had the disease remain at high risk of getting it.

How serious is H1N1?

H1N1 is usually a mild flu that occurs and cures on its own without treatment. But the flu can also be serious and cause complications, even death, especially among the vulnerable groups such as old people, children, people with pre-existing health conditions and pregnant women. The disease is additionally serious because it is new in the world and people are yet to develop immunity against it. This makes people even more vulnerable to it.

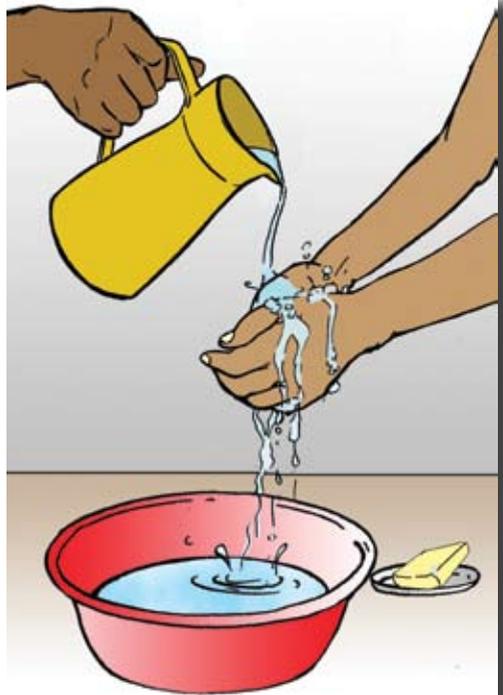
Can H1N1 be treated?

H1N1 can be treated easily if need for treatment arises. Health workers sometimes isolate H1N1 patients to monitor and ensure that they do not pass on the disease to other people and are treated in time when need arises.

STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING AND CONTAINING BIRD FLU

Most countries have developed integrated national action plans to guide efforts to prevent and contain bird flu. The plans include the following WHO recommended strategies:

- Reducing opportunities for human infection by improving poultry keeping practices to ensure that the disease does not occur on farms
- Maintaining high standards of personal hygiene, especially washing hands frequently
- Strengthening early warning systems by reporting dead birds to veterinary authorities, examining samples in the laboratory and collaborating with other countries and the international community.
- Containing and stamping out the disease where it has occurred by applying measures such as movement control, quarantine, culling and disinfection of the affected areas.





- Reducing infection, illness and death from the disease through appropriate treatment and immunization where available.
- Educating the public on the measures they can take to protect themselves and their families.
- Conducting research to improve prevention and control strategies and approaches.

IBAR GUIDELINES FOR CONTROL OF AVIAN AND HUMAN INFLUENZA

The Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources (IBAR) is supporting 47 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries to finalize and implement plans to prevent and contain avian and human influenza. The support is provided through the Support Programme to Integrated National Plans for Avian and Human Influenza (SPINAP-AHI), with funding from the European Union. The programme advises countries to focus on the following to prevent bird flu and the H1N1 flu.



- Finalize preparations to deal with an epidemic if it occurred. This should include activating crisis committees and a national command and control centre.
- Strengthen surveillance of influenza and related diseases.
- Strengthen capacity to detect H5N1 and H1N1 in a laboratory and take early action to contain the diseases.
- Acquire protective devices, such as masks for use in the event of an epidemic.
- Strengthen communication to increase awareness and promote practice of behaviours that can prevent and contain a flu outbreak.
- Strengthen reporting of suspected and confirmed cases of H5N1 and H1N1 using the appropriate national and international channels.
- Strengthen the capacity of health workers to carry out case management and make available medicines (antivirals and antibiotics) for use in treatment of patients.
- Acquire vaccines with the help of WHO and carry out vaccination on a wide scale giving priority to front line health workers and people at a high risk of suffering severe harm in the event of an outbreak. People at high risk include children below two years, pregnant women, people with lung disease such as tuberculosis (TB) and people with reduced body immunity, such as those suffering diseases such as diabetes.
- Prepare the key people to implement the national preparedness plans.



ROLE OF LEADERS

Leaders should support efforts to develop the capacities above in order to avert the catastrophe that would occur were bird flu or the H1N1 flu to spread and develop into a full blown killer pandemic on a wide scale. Leaders should:

- Take interest in bird flu and the H1N1 flu.
- Support initiatives to prevent the spread and the harmful effects of the two flus.
- Advocate for and make available the resources needed to prevent and contain the flus.

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