

1.1 **Public Health**

Public health emergencies may be related to outbreaks of infectious diseases (such as pandemic flu and West Nile virus), food and waterborne illnesses (such as *Salmonella* and *E. coli*) as well as other threats to the public's health and safety. Man-made attacks can also create public health emergencies.

In response to the terrorist events of September 2001, the Riverside County Department of Public Health established the Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Branch (PHEPR) in 2002. PHEPR's activities are funded by the following grants:

- The Centers For Disease Control and Prevention's Public Health Emergency Preparedness Program
- Metropolitan Medical Response System
- Department of Homeland Security (DHS), State Homeland Security Program
- Hospital Preparedness Program

The PHEPR Branch was established to assist and respond with an *All-Hazards* approach to all public health emergencies, natural or "man-made", including acts of terrorism.

The PHEPR Branch is responsible for the coordination of six key focus areas for public health preparedness:

- Local preparedness and readiness planning
- Surveillance and epidemiology capacity
- Biological and chemical agent laboratory capacity
- Communications and information technology
- Risk communications and health information dissemination
- Education and training

The PHEPR staff offers classroom and online education on topics such as emergency preparedness and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) for the community and first responders. Continuing education units are offered with most training. The PHEPR Branch also provides the community with comprehensive training from leading emergency preparedness experts. Examples include Pharmacy Emergency Response (University of Arizona) and EMS Operations and Planning for WMD (Texas A&M University).

The Riverside County Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Branch continually works to prepare the County and its health care system to respond to acts of terrorism and other public health emergencies. It is the vision of the PHEPR Branch to protect the County through a collaborative public health response by:

- Strengthening the public health infrastructure through mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery from public health emergencies
- Partnering with community agencies and organizations
- Reinforcing Riverside County hospitals' surge capacity capabilities
- Utilizing an All-Hazards emergency planning approach
- Maintaining a trained and optimal staff

For additional information, contact PHEPR, 951-358-7100 or visit www.rivcophepr.org.

1.1.1 Pandemic Flu

A pandemic is a global disease outbreak. A flu pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which people have little or no immunity and for which there is no vaccine. The disease spreads easily person-to-person causing serious illness and can sweep across the country and around the world in a short time.

It is difficult to predict when the next influenza pandemic will occur or how severe it will be. Wherever and whenever a pandemic starts, everyone around the world is at risk. Countries might, through measures such as border closures and travel restrictions, delay arrival of the virus, but it cannot be stopped.

Health professionals are concerned that the continued spread of a highly pathogenic avian H5N1 virus across eastern Asia and other countries represents a significant threat to human health. The H5N1 virus has raised concerns about a potential human pandemic because:

- It is especially virulent
- It is being spread by migratory birds
- It can be transmitted from birds to mammals and in some limited circumstances to humans and, like other influenza viruses, it continues to evolve

Since 2003, a growing number of H5N1 cases have been reported in Asia, Europe and Africa. More than half of the people infected with the H5N1 virus have died. It is believed that most of these cases have been caused by exposure to infected poultry. There has been no sustained human-to-human transmission of the disease, but the concern is that H5N1 will evolve into a virus capable of human-to-human transmission.

Everyone can contract the flu. Certain people are more likely to suffer severe consequences. This includes the elderly, infants and pregnant women, those with a weakened immune system and those who have chronic illnesses (especially those with respiratory issues like asthma). Those individuals (and their families) are urged to obtain the flu shot every fall. Everyone can benefit from vaccination and that can help to reduce the spread of disease in communities.

1.1.2 What to do if You Have the Flu?

The advice your grandmother gave is still the best. When sick get plenty of rest, drink lots of fluids and stay home to prevent spreading the flu. Over-the-counter medicines are usually all people need to feel better (pain relievers, cough drops, etc.). Children should never be given aspirin when they have the flu since it may cause a rare but serious condition called [Reye's Syndrome](#). Most people will not need to see a doctor when they have the flu; however, if symptoms become severe (problems breathing and extreme weakness) and a fever lasts for more than two to three days, consult with your doctor.

As with any disaster, you will want to have a Family Emergency Plan in place, a First Aid Kit on hand, a sufficient supply of water and your "Go-Bags" (See section 2.2 and 2.3 for details).

1.1.3 Pandemic Influenza

Many of the simple steps to prepare for a flu pandemic also impact things you should do for a wide-range of other emergencies. These include:

- Talk to your family members

- It is important to think about the health issues that could affect you and your family during a pandemic or other emergency
- Consider what you will need to care for you, your loved ones and pets in your home
- Stay informed
- The following are sites where you can learn more about flu and how to stay healthy:
 - www.pandemicflu.gov - (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)
 - www.cdc.gov/flu - (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
 - www.ready.gov/america - (U.S. Department of Homeland Security)
 - www.prepare.org - (Red Cross)
 - <http://bepreparedcalifornia.ca.gov/EPO/> - (California Department of Health Services)
 - www.getimmunizedca.org - (California Department of Health Services, Immunization Branch)

1.1.4 Health Tip

While pandemic flu is of great concern, seasonal flu causes a great deal of illnesses and death every year. The flu shot is the best way to keep from getting the flu. The flu shot is especially important for those who are most likely to get very sick from flu (like the elderly and infants). Even if you are not concerned about getting the flu, people rarely keep their illnesses to themselves. Avoid spreading the flu to others.