

The Denton County Health Department (DCHD) is responding to the menace of pandemic influenza using an aggressive planning, education and exercise campaign to actively prepare Denton County residents, businesses, and community organizations for the threat.

Last November 2005, the DCHD hosted the first pandemic influenza summit meeting involving community partners, stakeholders and disciplines from across the county. Participants included state and local public health, Denton County area hospitals, ISD's, universities, mental health providers, various county and municipal Emergency Managers and officials from multiple fire, EMS, and law enforcement departments. In mid-January of 2006, the DCHD continued their emergency preparations with the City of Denton and hosted a comprehensive pandemic influenza tabletop exercise testing pandemic influenza response capacities. Currently, on a daily basis, DCHD epidemiology team members monitor local, national, and international influenza activity for signs of any impending danger.

Although the threat of Avian Influenza for the United States is presently low, with no reported cases currently in birds or humans in this hemisphere, personal preparations for the possibility of an influenza pandemic would be instrumental in helping mitigate the adverse impact of a public health pandemic should the threat be realized. The most effective way to protect life and prevent the spread of communicable diseases, including influenza, is through good hygiene and improving your personal health.

Good hygiene habits include:

- Washing your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer often
- Covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing with a tissue and dispose of the tissue immediately. (If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crease of your elbow)
- Staying home and avoiding close contact with others if you become sick
- Avoiding contact with people who are sick, and
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose, or eyes without first washing your hands.

Improving personal health could occur from:

- Getting a seasonal flu shot
- Quitting smoking
- Making better food choices
- Exercising regularly
- Getting enough sleep, and
- Getting regular medical check-ups

It is important that everyone have a personal preparedness plan in the case of any emergency. In some emergencies, such as a pandemic influenza, official may ask families and individuals to shelter-in-place. That simply means they will need to remain at home (without leaving) such as on a “snow day.”

To shelter-in-place with the least discomfort, the DCHD and the Texas Department of State Health Services recommend that people have 10 days worth of the following items for each household member:

- water (1 gallon per day per household member)
- non-perishable food
- medical supplies (current medications, over the counter medications, and first aid supplies)
- clothing suitable for the weather conditions
- bedding
- tools, including a battery operated radio
- games to keep the children occupied
- important personal documentation (copies of driver’s licenses, social security cards, immunization records, bank records, birth certificates, contact information, lists of current medications and dosage requirements) and;
- personal items that family members could require.

These items should be kept in a convenient location in containers that can easily be moved.

Keeping Denton County residents safe and healthy is our primary responsibility and concern at the Denton County Health Department. Please take an active role in ensuring your own health and safety should an emergency occur in our county.