

How is Pandemic Flu Different than Regular Seasonal Flu?

SEASONAL FLU

Outbreaks follow predictable seasonal patterns; occurs annually, usually in winter, in temperate climates

Usually some immunity built up from previous exposure

Healthy adults usually not at risk for serious complications (the very young, the elderly and those with certain underlying health conditions at increased risk for serious complications)

Health systems can usually meet public and patient needs

Vaccine developed based on known virus strains and available for annual flu season

Adequate supplies of antivirals are usually available

Average U.S. deaths approximately 36,000/yr

Symptoms: fever, cough, runny nose, muscle pain. Deaths often caused by complications, such as pneumonia.

Generally causes modest impact on society (e.g., some school closing, encouragement of people who are sick to stay home)

Manageable impact on domestic and world economy

PANDEMIC FLU

Occurs rarely (three times in 20th century - last in 1968)

No previous exposure; little or no pre-existing immunity

Healthy people may be at increased risk for serious complications

Health systems may be overwhelmed

Vaccine probably would not be available in the early stages of a pandemic

Effective antivirals may be in limited supply

Number of deaths could be quite high (e.g., U.S. 1918 death toll approximately 500,000)

Symptoms may be more severe and complications more frequent

May cause major impact on society (e.g. widespread restrictions on travel, closings of schools and businesses, cancellation of large public gatherings)

Potential for severe impact on domestic and world economy

For additional information visit: www.pandemicflu.gov

The information on this fact sheet is based on fact sheets from the US. Department of Health and Human Services.