

## What is pandemic influenza?

Pandemic influenza is a topic being discussed everywhere you look these days, but many still do not fully understand the subject. When public health officials discuss pandemic flu, they are talking about a global disease outbreak that could occur when a new influenza virus appears and humans have no immunity. As a result of no immunity, the virus begins to cause serious illness and spreads easily person-to-person worldwide.

Influenza pandemics have occurred three times in the past century – in 1918, 1957 and 1968. Each of these pandemics had very different patterns of illness. In 1918, the pandemic caused at least 500,000 deaths in the U.S. But, the last pandemic, in 1968 was milder, causing about 34,000 deaths.

In the event of an influenza pandemic, scientists predict that unlike seasonal flu, most people of all ages would be seriously affected. But, Alabamians can start protecting themselves now by following basic infection control measures.

“We want people in the state to follow basic public health infection control measures such as getting your seasonal flu vaccine, washing your hands frequently with soap and water, covering your cough and staying away from others when they are sick,” said \_\_\_\_\_ (Public Health spokesperson).

Vaccines and antivirals will be limited and reserved for health care workers and first responders. People should talk to their health care provider now about pandemic influenza, as many providers may not be available during a pandemic outbreak.

For more information on pandemic flu, please visit the Alabama Department of Public Health Web site at [www.adph.org/pandemicflu](http://www.adph.org/pandemicflu).