

Pandemic Phases

In 1999 the World Health Organization (WHO) defined the phases of a pandemic in order to provide guidance for preparedness and response efforts. The phases were revised in 2005 as follows.

Interpandemic Period

Phase 1 — No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. One may be present in animals, but the risk to humans is considered to be low.

Action: Public health will work with partner agencies to strengthen preparedness through planning and exercises. They will also seek to raise awareness among the general public with basic information and encouragement to be prepared for all hazards.

Phase 2 — No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. A circulating animal influenza virus subtype poses a substantial risk to humans.

Action: Public health will work to minimize the risk of transmission to humans, such as killing infected or exposed animals. The health care community will work diligently to detect and report cases quickly.

Pandemic Alert Period

Phase 3 — Human infections with a new subtype have occurred, but there is no human-to-human spread, or only rare instances of spread with close contacts.

Action: Public health will work diligently to detect cases quickly. Laboratory samples will be collected and tested to confirm the virus subtype. The public should create a family plan, pack an all hazards supply kit and work with schools, businesses, churches, neighbors and social groups to create a community response plan.

Phase 4 — Small clusters of disease are occurring with limited human-to-human transmission, but the spread is highly localized, suggesting the virus is not well adapted to humans.

Action: Public health will work to contain the virus or slow the spread of the illness in order to buy time to acquire antiviral medications and equipment and develop a vaccine.

Phase 5 — Larger clusters of disease are occurring, but human-to-human spread is still localized. This suggests that the virus is becoming better adapted to humans, but may not yet be fully transmissible.

Action: Public health will be maximizing efforts to contain the virus or delay its spread in hopes of avoiding a pandemic. The public should ensure all hazards supply kits are fully stocked and that each family member is aware of the family response plan.

Pandemic Period

Phase 6 — The new subtype of influenza virus is spreading rapidly from human-to-human and is causing widespread illness and death.

Action: Public health will work tirelessly with their partners to minimize the impact of the pandemic. Schools may be closed. Social events may be cancelled. Services may be interrupted. The economy may suffer due to lack of business and employee absenteeism. Officials will call on the public to follow instructions that will help protect individuals and the community.