

## Bird Flu vs. Pandemic Flu

Media reports often talk about bird flu and pandemic flu in the same breath, but it's important to know that they are not the same thing.

Pandemic flu is a global outbreak of human disease. It is caused by a new influenza virus that is unlike any previous flu, so people will not have any natural immunity to it. The lack of immunity means that a pandemic flu can pass readily from person to person, creating widespread illness. Currently, there is no pandemic flu circulating.

Bird flu (or avian influenza) refers to a large group of different influenza viruses that primarily affect birds. Occasionally, these bird viruses can infect other species, including pigs and humans, but the

vast majority of avian flu viruses do not infect people.

The current bird flu outbreak in many parts of the world is caused by a type of influenza A virus called "H5N1." H5N1 is already spreading widely in global bird populations. In a very small number of cases, it has passed from birds to humans--generally through direct contact with infected birds—and in a handful of cases, it has passed from human to human. In the few instances of avian flu in humans, it has been deadly, killing nearly half of those infected. However, H5N1 remains a bird flu because it has not developed the ability to pass easily from person to person. If this change occurs, H5N1 will become a human influenza virus that could start a pandemic—and that's what worries health experts.

## Pandemic Flu FAQ

Q: How would a pandemic flu virus spread?

A: It would spread from person to person primarily through "respiratory secretions," the same way seasonal influenza viruses spread. Respiratory secretions are virus-containing droplets (such as spit or mucous) that are spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can then land on the surfaces of the mouth, nose, and throat of anyone nearby (i.e., within 3 feet). The virus may also be spread through contact with the infectious respiratory secretions on the hands of an infected person and other objects and surfaces, like doorknobs.

Q: Is there a vaccine for pandemic flu?

A: Not at this time. Because viruses change over time, work cannot begin on a specific pandemic influenza vaccine until a pandemic influenza virus emerges in humans. Vaccine production is a complicated and lengthy process. Once a pandemic influenza virus has been identified, it will likely take 4-6 months to develop, test, and begin produce large quantities of vaccine.



In preparation, the U.S. government is making efforts to increase manufacturers' ability to produce vaccine. Research is also underway to develop new ways to produce vaccines more quickly.

For responses to more frequently asked questions, please visit [www.metrokc.gov/health/pandemicflu](http://www.metrokc.gov/health/pandemicflu)