The mission of the American Red Cross is helping people prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies. The Red Cross not only responds to tens of thousands of disasters each year, but also has responded to many public health emergencies in the past such as the influenza pandemic of 1918.

Scientists have informed organizations in the U.S. and abroad about the significant possibility of an influenza (flu) pandemic occurring. Even though they cannot accurately predict when the next pandemic will occur, or whether the avian influenza (H5N1) virus will cause the next human pandemic, scientists all agree that the best action the public can take now to prepare.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is constantly on the lookout for the first signs of a flu pandemic. At first sign, the WHO will take immediate steps to try to contain it. Once a flu pandemic affects other countries, it will reach the United States. With the popularity of air travel, the chances of it reaching the U.S. sooner are increased.

The WHO will inform governments worldwide when a flu pandemic starts. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will make announcements in the U.S. advising the best course of action – using television, radio, print and the internet throughout different phases of a pandemic.

The Red Cross works with organizations such as the WHO and CDC, and at this time has taken on the role of working with communities across the country on flu pandemic education. As an organization that connects individuals and families to important preparedness information every day, the Red Cross continues to develop flu pandemic material that can be easily understood and applied in your community and household.

Quick Reference

**Epidemic:** the rapid spread of a disease that infects some or many people in a community or region at the same time.

**Pandemic:** an outbreak of a disease that affects large numbers of people around the world.

**Influenza (Flu):** a contagious respiratory illness caused by particular strains of viruses.

**Influenza (Flu) Pandemic:** a global outbreak of the influenza disease that occurs when a new influenza virus appears in the human population. Because people have little or no immunity to the new strain, serious illness can occur, and the virus can spread easily and rapidly from person to person with no vaccine immediately available.

**Avian Influenza:** commonly known as bird flu, this strain of influenza virus is naturally occurring in birds. Wild birds can carry the virus and may not get sick from it; however, domestic birds may become infected by the virus and often die from it.

**H5N1:** the scientific name for a subtype of the avian influenza (bird flu) virus that has spread from birds to humans.

To get more information on the Red Cross flu pandemic efforts or to get involved in raising awareness of the flu pandemic, contact your local Red Cross chapter.