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## Health District encourages community to prepare for a flu pandemic

LAS VEGAS - The Southern Nevada Health District encourages the community - both individual households and businesses - to develop communication and disaster preparedness plans that can be implemented for emergency situations including an influenza pandemic.

A pandemic is a worldwide outbreak or epidemic of a disease, such as influenza. Such an outbreak could cause disruptions for families and businesses as infected individuals could not come to work. For example, the 1918-19 Spanish Flu pandemic killed 675,000 Americans and between 20 and 40 million people worldwide. Especially vulnerable were younger adults between the ages of 20 and 40. If such an event happens, businesses such as grocery stores could shut down as well as schools and offices. According to the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. economy loses \$10 billion in productivity when a typical influenza outbreak occurs. If a pandemic occurred, it could cost the U.S. economy \$70 to \$160 billion.

"Having an emergency preparedness kit that includes a stockpile of supplies is one of the most important steps individuals can do to prepare for a possible outbreak," said Dr. Lawrence Sands, the health district's chief health officer. The health district's Office of Public Health Preparedness encourages the community to take a multi-hazard approach to preparedness as the area could experience an event such as a widespread influenza epidemic or a natural disaster. The health district completes planning and training exercises designed to promote preparedness for possible epidemics. The training is directly applicable to responding to an influenza outbreak as well as to other disease outbreaks.

Many health officials are concerned that the current avian flu that has been found in Asia can cause the next pandemic. While there have been 321 human cases of the H5N1 influenza virus since 2003, there are no documented cases of sustained person-to-person transmission of the avian flu, which would be necessary for the virus to cause a pandemic.

"A flu pandemic differs from a seasonal influenza outbreak as it would be a unique strain for which no one will have natural immunity and no vaccine will be immediately available to protect people. It would also be able to spread quickly and easily from person-to-person," said Sands. "We want to educate the public that influenza is a very serious disease that can result in severe health complications, hospitalization or death for persons with high-risk conditions. Each year, more than 30,000 people die from it in the United States and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized. We want Southern Nevadans to be aware and prepared for the possibility that such an epidemic can happen."

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Prepare for flu pandemic – add one

To safeguard themselves and their families during seasonal flu outbreaks or in a worldwide epidemic, Southern Nevadans should follow flu preventions steps to stay healthy:

- Get a flu shot annually
- Practice good hygiene by frequent hand washing
- Cough into the sleeve or crook of the arm if tissues are not available.

The health district's recommendations for a family emergency preparedness kit include enough supplies to sustain everyone for up to three weeks. The kit should include:

- Non-perishable food such as ready-to-eat canned meats, soups, fruits, vegetables, peanut butter, protein bars
- One gallon of water per person per day and fluids with electrolytes that will last for up to two weeks
- Prescription and over-the-counter medications
- Toiletries including soap
- Pet food/medications/leashes/collars/ID tag
- Baby formula and diapers
- Extra batteries for flashlight and radios
- Half-full gas tank in the car
- Extra glasses
- Garbage bags
- Cash

The health district and the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce recommend key steps businesses can take to prepare. Together, they recommend the "Pandemic Flu Planning Tool Kit" and an "Open for Business" planning guide. Part of a business' disaster preparedness plan should include:

- Assuring core business activities can be sustained over several weeks.
- Strategies for addressing the interruption of essential governmental services such as sanitation, water, power and disruptions to food supply.
- Identifying essential functions of the company and the people who perform them as the absence of these individuals could seriously impair business continuity.
- Strategies for maintaining a healthy work environment: i.e. promoting hand and respiratory hygiene, ensuring adequate air circulation, and posting tips on preventing the spread of germs.
- Updating sick leave and family medical leave policies, including extending pay during high-risk situations and making sure sick employees stay at home.
- Developing off-site work solutions that allow employees to work from home with appropriate security and network access to applications.
- Expanding online and self-service options for customers and business partners
- Communication strategies to tell employees about the threat of a pandemic and how the company is preparing for it.

For more information on how you can fight the flu and prepare for a pandemic, visit [www.flurevolution.com](http://www.flurevolution.com) or [www.SouthernNevadaHealthDistrict.org](http://www.SouthernNevadaHealthDistrict.org).