

The Facts About Flu



What is the flu?

There is a lot of talk about flu going around, especially at this time of year. Co-workers may tell you they have stomach flu, a neighbor may have a touch of the flu and now there are news reports about avian flu. What is the truth about flu?

Influenza, or the flu, is a respiratory infection caused by the influenza virus. Flu season in New Mexico and the U.S. starts in the fall and usually lasts until April. In a normal flu season, the best defense against the flu is to get a flu shot.

What are symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of influenza include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Body aches
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Dry cough

Some people with flu develop more serious complications like pneumonia and need to be hospitalized.

What's referred to as the stomach flu is a different kind of infection, caused by an intestinal virus. Symptoms of stomach flu are nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or abdominal cramps. Influenza is a respiratory infection and not a stomach or intestinal disease.

How do you get the flu?

Flu is spread from person to person by respiratory secretions, such as when someone coughs or sneezes near your face. Flu can also be spread if you touch a surface or object that has been contaminated with infected respiratory secretions and then touch your nose, mouth or eyes.

What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza, or bird flu, is an influenza infection in birds. Wild birds worldwide carry

many types of flu virus in their intestines, but usually do not get sick from them. The virus *can* spread from wild birds to chickens, ducks, and turkeys, making them sick and sometimes killing them.

Very rarely, bird flu has spread from birds to humans. This has happened in Asia when humans have had direct contact with the stool or secretions of infected poultry.

Have there been cases of bird flu in humans?

There is no evidence of H5N1 bird flu in the United States. The H5N1 bird flu virus has spread among wild and domestic birds in Asia and Europe. Between 1997 and November 1, 2005 about 120 people were diagnosed with H5N1 bird flu in Asia.

What is a flu pandemic?

An influenza pandemic is a worldwide flu outbreak that occurs when a new type of flu virus infects humans, spreading easily from person to person. This is different from the seasonal flu that occurs every winter and early spring in New Mexico.

When there is a flu pandemic, many people do not have antibodies that protect them against the new virus. As a result, many more people can get sick than during a normal flu season. If there were a flu pandemic, it could lead to high levels of illness, death, social disruption, and economic loss.

Emergency Medical Systems Saving Lives is Part of the Job

Emergency Medical Systems is the statewide network of 911 dispatchers, first responders, medical and rescue squads, air and ground ambulances, and hospital emergency departments. First responders are available 24 hours a day to help a choking child, a grandparent who has had a heart attack or a teenager in a car accident. New Mexico's emergency medical staff answer half a million calls a year. Saving lives is a normal part of the job.

Especially in rural areas, the network of partners that makes up Emergency Medical Systems is a vital safety net. These partners include the Health Department Emergency Medical Systems Bureau, the University of New Mexico Center for Disaster Medicine, local municipalities and counties, police and fire departments, volunteers, and emergency rooms.

The emergency network that answers daily routine crises is equally ready to respond to a disaster. In recent years, responders throughout the state have been trained in life saving skills in response to a terrorist attack.

New Mexico now has an upgraded UHF Radio Communication System, equipped to relay signals across the entire state, even through mountainous terrain. Emergency medical technicians use the system to coordinate care with emergency rooms and physicians while they are transporting patients to the ER. In a disaster, the radio system will provide communication even if phone systems and the Internet may fail.

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Preparing for a Public Health Emergency – It's Everyone's Job!

Safe & Ready for Happy Holidays!

Whether you are home for the holidays or you travel, a few simple precautions can prevent emergencies, and make this a holiday celebration to remember for years to come.

This issue of *Safe & Ready* tells you how to prevent the kinds of emergencies that families face now and year 'round. **Page 2-3**

If you do need help, first responders – fire fighters, emergency medical technicians and others – are there for you. Saving lives is part of their job, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year. **Page 4**

Influenza. There's the normal virus we get shots for every year. And there's avian flu, which people are talking about all over the world. *Safe & Ready* looks at both and gives you the facts. **Page 4**

Whether the emergency is a flu epidemic or a natural disaster, the *all hazards approach* enables New Mexico public agencies to be ready. See the Secretary of Health's Column. **Page 2**

The Director of the Governor's Office of Homeland Security talks about how partnerships and planning pave the way for a coordinated response. **Page 3**



All of us here at the New Mexico Department of Health wish you and your loved ones a safe and joyful holiday season.



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About Tamiflu®

Tamiflu® and Relenza® are antiviral medicines that can prevent flu or lessen the symptoms. Because there are no cases of H5N1 bird flu in the United States now, the New Mexico Department of Health advises **against** getting these medications "just in case." These medicines must be taken properly to be effective. They are now in limited supply.



protect yourself & your family from the flu

- **Wash your hands often**, especially after coughing or sneezing and before touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- **Try not to touch** your eyes, nose and mouth.
- **Toss tissues immediately** where they won't be touched by others and wash your hands.
- When you know that flu is spreading, **avoid crowded places**.
- If you are ill, **stay home**. Don't spread flu to others.
- **If you are ill** and need to see your healthcare providers, let them know what your symptoms are before you show up. If you have a cough, you may be asked to wear a mask to prevent spreading the flu to others in the waiting room.
- **Learn more** about the flu on page 4!





From the
Secretary
of Health

The All Hazards Approach to Emergency Planning

The New Mexico Department of Health works closely with all sectors of our society to prepare for any possible emergency, using what is called an *all hazards approach*. This concept allows us to develop plans, facilities, training, and communications systems to cope with any disaster, from a wildfire to an epidemic. The Department of Public Safety and the Office of Homeland Security are our partners in both emergency preparedness and emergency response.

The all hazards approach allowed us to respond swiftly to the needs of the people of Louisiana and Texas during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. During both emergencies, experienced New Mexico medical teams traveled to those states quickly, taking 100 tons of medical and emergency supplies and equipment, including generators, medication and communications systems. They created treatment centers in the Superdome in New Orleans and along the coast in Texas, treating injuries and illnesses around the clock.

Here at home, the Department of Health worked with the Red Cross and other emergency groups to address the health issues of evacuees from Louisiana and Texas who arrived in New Mexico seeking shelter. We provided a swift, coordinated response to their needs.

In 2000, the all hazards approach allowed the state to safely evacuate 15,000 people from their homes in Los Alamos and White Rock. Patients were evacuated smoothly from Española Hospital. All evacuees had access to their prescription medications and received the support they needed. The Department of Health worked as a team with the Department of Public Safety, the National Guard, and other agencies, anticipating the needs of residents and activating the systems that would fill those needs.

The all hazards approach has proven itself in New Mexico. It is flexible enough to encompass a range of emergencies, but specific enough to address individual needs. It is the framework that allows local, county state, tribal and federal agencies, private and public partnerships, businesses, churches, community groups and individuals to participate together to preserve health and well-being in any situation.

Michelle Lujan Grisham

Michelle Lujan Grisham
Secretary, New Mexico Department of Health

Family Emergencies: An Ounce of Prevention



For many, the holidays are times of warmth, tradition and family celebrations. But for others, it can be a difficult time, bringing up sadness for lost family members and a feeling of isolation for those who cannot enter into the celebration.

It is also a time of potential dangers, when candles are lit near playing children, extension cords can become a hazard, and drivers may drink more than they had planned.

Seniors and children visiting family in unfamiliar surroundings can fall or hurt themselves in other ways. The result is a surge in 911 calls, emergency room visits, and the stress of coping with an emergency. Preventing family emergencies can make all the difference. *Safe & Ready* offers ideas, tips, and strategies to make the holidays safe for everyone.

And if you do have an emergency, don't hesitate to call 911. First responders are there for you every day of the year.



Home Injuries

For Visitors

- Put night lights in halls and bathrooms
- Place non-skid mats or strips in the bath tub
- Set water temperature at less than 120 degrees to prevent burns
- Remove clutter from halls and stairs
- Remove scatter and throw rugs or secure them with double-sided tape

Holiday Lights, Candles, Fires

- Never replace bulbs when the switch is on
- Do not use lights or extension cords that are damaged
- Don't run strings of light under the carpet
- Use a stable support when hanging lights
- Don't allow children to play with lights. Be sure candles are out of their reach
- Blow out candles when leaving the room
- Place candles away from curtains, books and other items
- Store matches and lighters out of the reach of children
- If you make a fire in your fireplace, be sure the chimney and flue are clean



Hidden Guns

Children are more likely to find guns during holidays or their birthdays when they are looking for gifts. Research shows a child can find a hidden object at home in 8 minutes. If you have guns, use gun locks, store guns in locked cabinets and secure the keys in a different place, away from the weapons.

Drunk Driving

- If you drink, **don't** drive
- Serve non-alcoholic drinks • If you serve alcohol, serve food as well
- Collect visitors' car keys in a basket near the door and don't let them drive when drunk
- Make sure visitors have designated drivers who are not drinking. If they don't, arrange a ride home or call a cab
- Fresh air, black coffee, cold showers and exercise **will not** sober up a person who has been drinking
- Tell teenage drivers you will pick them up **anywhere, anytime**, no questions asked



Holidays can increase feelings of stress, loneliness and despair. This places some of us at risk for suicidal thoughts or family violence. Try to stay tuned to the feelings of the people around you. Here are some ideas for coping with the problems that may come up.



Suicide

Warning Signs:

- Hopeless comments, such as: "No one cares if I'm alive or dead," "Nothing matters anymore," "I want to kill myself." Such statements are calls for help
- Depression or withdrawal
- Behaving recklessly or differently, dressing differently
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Giving away prized belongings

Responding to an Immediate Suicide Threat:

- Ask directly: "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" Take the person seriously
- Don't try to handle it alone. Get help. Call 911 if necessary
- Express concern. Listen, move closer, maintain eye contact
- Be understanding, not judgmental
- Don't promise not to speak to anyone. You may need to seek help for the person
- Try not to leave the person alone

For information: National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255 (24 hours)

Family Violence

Warning Signs:

- Criticizing, controlling, constantly checking • Acting jealous or possessive
- Threatening, blaming, minimizing others' fears • Constant anger, especially while drinking
- Animal abuse is a warning sign for abuse in the family

Responding to Abuse or Threats:

- It's important to know that violence against a spouse, child or elder is a crime
- If you are a victim of family violence, report it. It is your right to be protected
- The victim of family violence is never to blame • If you or a family member is attacked, call 911
- If you are afraid for yourself or your children, leave. Go to a relative or find a shelter

For information and referrals:

The National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233 (24 hours)

The New Mexico Coalition Against Domestic Violence 505-246-9240 (9:00 to 5:00)

Safe House, a shelter serving New Mexico 1-800-773-3645

Domestic Violence Legal Resources Hotline 1-877-974-3400

Report Child Abuse 1-800-797-3260 (New Mexico Department of Children, Youth and Families)

From the
Director of
Homeland
Security



Planning & Partnerships Essential to Emergency Response

Homeland Security and emergency response is not one challenge, it is a series of challenges requiring a coordinated response from all of us: public agencies, communities, families and businesses. Emergencies threaten a broad range of public services, including energy, transportation, water, communication, and health. An effective response means collaboration among agencies, businesses and individuals who work independently in normal times. It is a collaboration taking place under the most stressful circumstances, but it is essential.

We live in a complex society and the threats are equally complex: cyber-security, border security, and the security of critical infrastructure that allows our society to function. By partnering with local and tribal governments, we have set up communications to respond together to a broad range of emergencies, including natural disasters, epidemics, or acts of terrorism. Equally important, we have conducted training and exercises to rehearse the responses required during an emergency.

Planning is essential to response. State agencies work intensively with counties and tribal communities to update local emergency plans. Every school and business should have an emergency plan, including evacuation procedures, safety guidelines, communication policies, conservation of essential records and a strategy for continuity of services. Every family should have an emergency plan and a home readiness kit to assure the safety of all family members.

The most important job of government is to safeguard the lives and well-being of all of us. Together we can take the steps that are necessary to preserve and protect our families, our communities, our resources, and our essential services.

Timothy W. Manning

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