

## **Introduction-**

### **Why All the Hype Over the Swine Flu?**

#### **-Humans Have No Immunity to H1N1 (Swine Flu)**

- The human population has no immunities built up to fight the H1N1 (Swine) Flu. We **do** have some immunity to the seasonal flu. The health system and pharmaceutical companies have little trouble keeping up with the demand for care and drugs with seasonal flu.
- The Swine Flu is a brand new flu, mutating for the first time to human to human transmission. Because no human has ever had this strain of flu, there is no immunity. With no human immunity the entire population is susceptible to the virus. **With a brand new flu there is no vaccine and developing and producing enough vaccine for a new flu takes five to six months.**
- **With no immunities, and no vaccine, as much as 40% of the population may become ill.** With 40% of the population ill transportation, government entities, utilities, and of course healthcare systems will be operating at a fraction of the normal capacity.
- **A surge in patients and reduction in available home health care workers,** as well as potential public transit disruptions, make it unlikely that the traditional approach to providing health care services will be possible during an influenza pandemic.

## **History -**

- **Influenza pandemics** are recurring natural disasters, having **struck during the 20th century in 1918, 1957, and 1968.**
- **The 1918 “Spanish flu,”** the deadliest pandemic in history, is estimated to have **killed more than 50 million people worldwide.**
- Given that the current world population is more than three times as large as that of 1918, **an influenza pandemic, regardless of its severity, could result in millions of deaths.**
- **Morbidity rates during past pandemics reached 25 - 35 percent of the total population.** A similar morbidity rate in any future influenza pandemic could result in millions of Americans seeking medical care.
- Such a **pandemic could quickly overwhelm U.S. hospitals and emergency departments,** which have little if any surge capacity.
- Given that a pandemic influenza outbreak may overwhelm the resources of a community’s health care system, it is necessary to make plans for the allocation of scarce resources in a manner that is appropriate for such an emergency. It is critical to examine, prior to a pandemic outbreak, the most appropriate and efficient ways in which care can be provided to the largest numbers of the ill.

## **Influenza Definitions**

*Seasonal (or common) flu* is a respiratory illness that can be transmitted person to person. Most people have some immunity, and a vaccine is available.

*Pandemic flu* is virulent human flu that causes a global outbreak, or pandemic, of serious illness. Because there is little natural immunity, the disease can spread easily from person to person. Currently, there is no pandemic flu. Source: [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov).

*Swine flu*, (H1N1) Daniel Perez, program director of the University of Maryland-based Prevention and Control of Avian Influenza Coordinated Agricultural Project, AICAP. "The virus formed when avian, swine, and human-like viruses combined in a pig to make a new virus. After mutating to be able to spread by respiratory droplets and infect humans, it is now spreading between humans by sneezing and coughing."

*Surge capacity* is a measurable representation of a health care system's ability to manage a sudden or rapidly progressive influx of patients within the currently available resources at a given point in time.

**What to Expect During a Pandemic** In the event of an influenza pandemic, because of anticipated shortages of health care professionals and widespread implementation of social distancing techniques, it is expected that the large majority of individuals infected with the influenza virus will be cared for in the home by family members, friends, and other members of the community - not by trained health care professionals. Given these circumstances, home health care workers can expect to be called on to provide care for two main populations of patients:

- Those medical and surgical patients, not hospitalized because of the pandemic, who are well enough to be discharged early from hospitals to free up hospital beds for more severely ill patients.
- Patients who become or already are dependent on home health care services (predominantly elderly persons with chronic disease) and will continue to need in-home care during the influenza pandemic whether or not they become infected with the influenza virus.
- The demand for home health care services during a pandemic influenza outbreak is likely to exceed the home health care industry's current capacity to respond. Indeed, the overall surge capacity and preparedness levels of the home health care sector that will be necessary to respond effectively to a public health emergency such as pandemic influenza are significant unknowns.

#### **-What Should My Agency Be Doing Today?**

- **Existing emergency plans should be initiated for patients, employees, and businesses.**
- **Review infection control measures with staff, emphasize mode of transmission.**
- **Staff may have sick children and some schools have closed. What plans do you have for your family and their care?**
- **Hospitals may begin discharging stable patients to open up beds. What plans does your agency have for a sudden influx of admissions? (Surge capacity.)**
- **The preferred place of care for influenza patients is in the home. Have you distributed the CDC's document Taking Care of a Sick Person in the home?**

<http://www.hclanet.org/associations/828/files/CDC%20Advisory%20on%20Home%20Care%20-%20Swine%20Flu.pdf>

#### **RESOURCES**

To view the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza, go to <http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/pandemic-influenza.html>.

To view the **Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza**, go to <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/federal/strateryimplementationplan.html>.

**The Pandemic and All-hazards Preparedness Act (S3678) can be viewed at** [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109\\_cong\\_public\\_laws&docid=f:publ417.109](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ417.109)