

Saint Mary's Health and Wellness asks,  
**did you know?**

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## FLU NEWS

In recent media there has been frequent mention of bird flu (avian influenza) and a flu pandemic. In an attempt to keep the Saint Mary's College community informed, Health and Wellness Services is going to address FLU NEWS in the next few *Did You Know?* publications.

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*Our third in the series:*

### **Pandemic Flu**

*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.

A pandemic is a worldwide epidemic. Every year in the United States and throughout the world, influenza viruses cause pandemics. However, because many people have some immunity, yearly epidemics don't infect everyone. The strains of influenza that cause pandemics are different than those that cause epidemics. Virtually no one in the world is immune to pandemic viruses. For this reason, pandemic strains of influenza sweep across the world unchecked. Typically, many more people become ill and die during pandemics than during yearly epidemics.

***How often do influenza pandemics occur?*** On average, influenza pandemics occur about three times every century. During the past 120 years, influenza pandemics occurred five times: in 1889, 1900, 1918, 1957 and 1968. Some pandemics are more damaging than others. The pandemics of 1957 and 1968 killed 4 million and 6 million people, respectively. But the pandemic of 1918 was even more devastating – a virus known as Spanish flu killed between 20 million and 50 million people. Death rates are determined by four factors: the number of people who become infected, the virulence of the virus, the underlying characteristics and vulnerability of affected populations and the availability and effectiveness of preventive measures. Additional information on Pandemics history can be found at: <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/general/historicaloverview.html>

***What would be the impact of a Pandemic?*** A pandemic may come and go in waves, each of which can last for six to eight weeks. An especially severe influenza pandemic could lead to high levels of illness, death, social disruption, and economic loss. Everyday life would be disrupted because so many people in so many places become seriously ill at the same time. Impacts can range from school and business closings to the interruption of basic services such as public transportation and food delivery.

A substantial percentage of the world's population will require some form of medical care. Health care facilities can be overwhelmed, creating a shortage of hospital staff, beds, ventilators and other supplies. Surge capacity at non-traditional sites such as schools may need to be created to cope with demand. The need for vaccine is likely to outstrip supply and the supply of antiviral drugs is also likely to be inadequate early in a pandemic. Difficult decisions will need to be made regarding who gets antiviral drugs and vaccines.

***How are we preparing?* The United States has been working closely with other countries and the World Health Organization (WHO) to strengthen systems to detect outbreaks of influenza that might cause a pandemic. The effects of a pandemic can be lessened if preparations are made ahead of time. Planning and preparation information and checklists are being prepared for various sectors of society, including information for individuals and families.**

Health and Human Services (HHS) and other federal agencies are providing funding, advice, and other support to your state to assist with pandemic planning and preparation. The federal government will provide up-to-date information and guidance to the public through the public media and this web site should an influenza pandemic unfold.

Saint Mary's College has a *Pandemic Flu Task Force* developing a plan that will be put into place should a pandemic such as Avian Flu or a similar condition ever impact our campus. Watch the *SMC Intranet* page for further information.