

The Public Health Response

Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health continues to plan, exercise and train staff to respond to public health emergencies. Individuals can do their part by beginning to prepare as well.

Public health departments were not always involved in emergency preparedness. But after the events of September 11th, the government encouraged first responders — police, fire, emergency medical services and public health — to band together and have a plan for coordinating future emergencies. In Ramsey County, we responded quickly to the call.

Public Health Emergency Preparedness

Our department is equipped to respond to “all hazards” known to public health officials today. These include diseases related to food or water, or an outbreak of a communicable disease such as meningitis or influenza. We have developed plans for addressing the health effects of a natural disaster such as a flood or a human caused disaster such as an anthrax release.

Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health has detailed plans to address a wide

variety of health emergencies and ensure the health of the public. We also have communication equipment to keep us connected with first responders. We test these plans and equipment periodically with our partners to make certain each of us knows what our job is and how to do it when disaster strikes.

Our Partners

We collaborate with other local public health departments, hospitals and clinics, local emergency managers, police, fire, sheriff’s departments, emergency medical services, Minnesota Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Your Role

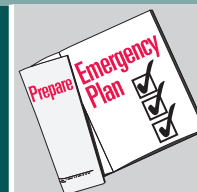
When news of an emergency hits, pay attention. Listen to the radio. Follow directions from Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health and the Minnesota Department of Health. Make necessary preparations outlined in other areas of this brochure. Take warnings seriously! Remember, everyone plays a role in preparing for emergencies.

Resources

www.co.ramsey.mn.us
www.health.state.mn.us
www.echominnesota.org
www.redcross.org

Emergencies Happen

Prepare.



Practice.



Participate.



Prepare.

Practice.

Participate.

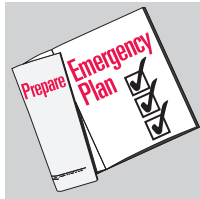


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Prepare.

Practice.

Participate.



Emergencies happen, often when least expected. Tornadoes ravage neighborhoods. Storms down electrical lines. Waterborne illnesses bring sickness. The future could hold additional challenges such as pandemic flu, meningitis or tuberculosis.

You and your family can deal with emergencies by being prepared. Before a crisis hits have the following:

- An emergency contact list with the names of friends and relatives you can call in case of disaster. Include a few outside your area code since they will be easier to contact when a disaster hits. Place copies in the family car and near your main phone.
- A battery-operated radio, a traditional corded phone and a charged cell phone.
- An escape strategy if your home catches fire or sits in the path of disaster.
- Emergency supplies containing a two week supply of water, non-perishable packaged food, bedding, a radio, a first-aid kit, garbage bags and prescription medicines.

In addition, teach yourself how to turn off water, gas and electricity at main switches in your home. Pick a meeting space outside your neighborhood in case family members are separated.

Hope for the best, prepare for the worst. In an emergency, it will matter.

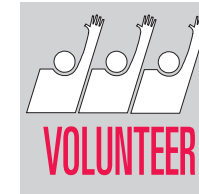


Just as schools run fire drills and corporations have emergency practice runs, families and individuals should practice their emergency plans. In the event of an emergency, this practice can lessen stress and save lives.

Consider the following ideas:

- Test smoke detectors monthly.
- Review your disaster plan and your emergency supplies twice a year.
- Σ Once a year practice the emergency plan, update your contact card, and check your fire extinguisher.
- Once a year update medical and financial documents and change your smoke detector batteries.
- Update your emergency contact list as it changes and practice healthy hygiene as described in an insert available from Saint Paul-Ramsey County Public Health.

Practicing can be made fun for family members through quizzes and games. Being prepared will help you know what to do in an emergency.



Your community needs you. Plenty of opportunities exist for getting involved in emergency preparedness

in Ramsey County. Even if you're not involved in health care, plenty of programs will train volunteers to be at the front lines of a health crisis, among them:

- The Medical Reserve Corps of Ramsey County, which brings together local health professionals to help the Ramsey County community to prepare for and respond to public health emergencies. The group provides a way for health professionals and others to efficiently volunteer their expertise during public health emergencies and offers training of volunteers for their roles in a crisis. To get involved e-mail mrc-ramsey@co.ramsey.mn.us. Or call 651-266-2480.
- The Minnesota Citizen Corps Council, part of the network of Citizens Corps created by the Department of Homeland Security, offers emergency responder disciplines, community and volunteer service organizations, government, and the private sector and individuals a way to collaborate on increasing citizen preparedness in their communities. The group promotes public awareness, offers training and encourages collaboration among agencies and the public. For more information **contact 651-201-7400 or e-mail dps.hsem@state.mn.us**.
- The Twin Cities Chapter of the Red Cross provides plenty of volunteer opportunities. Call 651-291-6707 or email: volunteers@arcstp.org

Ramsey County encourages citizens with the time and interest to contact these organizations and participate in creating a safer community in the future.

Avian Influenza or “Bird flu”

Avian influenza, or “bird flu,” is a viral disease commonly seen in domestic poultry and wild birds.

You may have heard a lot about avian flu in the media. Avian influenza is an infection caused by influenza viruses that occur naturally in birds.

Several strains of the flu virus exist in birds. Currently, the most serious one to humans, “H5N1,” has been transmitted to an isolated number of people in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe.

Virtually all of these people became ill through direct contact with infected birds or their wastes. There is no evidence of H5N1 having caused disease in birds or people in the United States.

No immune protection exists against the bird flu in the human population. Hand washing and other safe practices described below will help to reduce the risk associated with potentially contaminated birds or materials.

Cooking Poultry

You cannot get avian influenza from properly handled and cooked poultry and eggs. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) suggests following these simple steps when cooking chicken:

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- Keep raw poultry away from other foods to prevent cross-contamination.
- After washing cutting boards, knives and countertops with

hot, soapy water, sanitize them with a bleach solution (1 teaspoon chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water).

- Use a food thermometer to make certain chicken has reached the safe internal temperature of at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Cook eggs until whites and yolks are firm.

In order to ensure the safety of poultry, the USDA has begun an aggressive program of import restrictions, international assistance to countries with bird flu, outbreak monitoring and research.

Dead Birds

If you find a dead bird leave it or simply put it in a plastic bag and dispose of it in the garbage — and then wash your hands thoroughly.

Recreation

Because the H5N1 virus is currently not in the US, you cannot get bird flu from bird droppings in parks, ballparks, reservoirs, golf courses or public places.

Many different bacteria, viruses and parasites can be present in bird droppings, which can cause other illnesses in humans. Avoid exposure to potential disease by following these precautions:

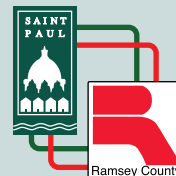
- Avoid touching birds, bird droppings, and other bird wastes.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after coming into contact with birds, or vegetation, soil and other materials that may have been contaminated.
- Teach your children to wash their hands after playing outside.
- Keep your shoes on in areas with bird droppings.
- Remove soiled shoes, boots and other footwear before entering your home. Footwear may be disinfected by using a bleach solution (1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water).
- Use a shovel, “pooper scooper,” or gloves — never use your bare hands — if you pick up droppings.

Prepare.

Practice.

Participate.

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Avian Influenza or “Bird flu” continued

- If you are worried about exposure during swimming, swim at a regulated beach, where regular tests are conducted to make sure the water is not polluted from human, animal or farm waste.

Advice for hunters

- Do not handle or butcher game animals that are obviously sick or found dead.
- Wear rubber gloves and washable clothing when cleaning game.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol wipes immediately after handling game.
- Wash tools and working surfaces with soap and water, then disinfect with a 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water.
- Place uncooked game in a plastic bag or container for transport and cook game meat thoroughly to an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

Travel

If you're planning on traveling abroad, check health advisories to determine if avian influenza is a concern in the countries you plan to visit. <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>

Influenza Pandemics

An influenza pandemic or pandemic flu occurs when a type of influenza (flu) virus changes — or mutates — into a form that easily spreads from person to person. Unlike the more common seasonal flu, a flu pandemic would cause many more deaths.

Pandemic flu has occurred three times in the past century: The “Spanish Flu” of 1918, the “Asian Flu” of 1957 and the “Hong Kong Flu” of 1968. Each of these pandemics lasted a year before public health was restored to normal.

Pandemics occur naturally and remain unpredictable. No one can anticipate when there will be other influenza pandemics. Here are the facts about pandemic influenza.

How The Flu Spreads

All types of Influenza spread when droplets containing the flu virus are passed from person to person. That’s why washing your hands often, covering your cough and sneezing into a sleeve or a tissue will help prevent the spread of infection. The flu virus can also be spread by contact with surfaces, such as doorknobs and countertops that have been contaminated by the virus.

Stopping The Spread

Practicing good hygiene habits such as frequent hand washing, covering your cough and staying at home when sick will help prevent the spread of the influenza virus. Social gatherings may be cancelled during a pandemic to lessen the spread of disease in the community.

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Vaccinating people is another important method used to control an influenza pandemic but it will take time to create the right vaccine to protect people. Before an effective vaccine is available, isolation and quarantine are common practices to help minimize the impacts of pandemic influenza. Isolation is for infected people who will be hospitalized or told by health authorities to remain at home; quarantines are for those who may have been exposed to the virus but show no signs of illness.

Vaccine

Since a pandemic flu cannot be predicted in advance no reliable way exists to develop a vaccine that will effectively protect people from the strain. Once the flu virus is identified, scientists will create a vaccine as rapidly as possible. The process, however, can take months.

Treatments During An Influenza Pandemic

Hospitals, clinics and pharmacies may be overwhelmed during an influenza pandemic. People may need to care for the sick in their homes. Antiviral drugs like Tamiflu may help ease influenza’s symptoms. Bed rest, liquids, proper nutrition and over-the-counter medicines will also help ease discomfort.

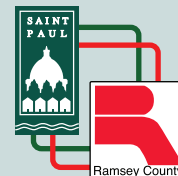
The Public Health Role In An Influenza Pandemic

Public health departments such as Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health are working on plans to address a pandemic caused by infectious diseases. Efforts are currently underway to make us better prepared for a possible influenza pandemic by providing for people’s health care needs and maximize the availability of vaccines and antiviral drugs.

Influenza Pandemic Preparation

Washing your hands regularly is one of the best ways to protect yourself against any kind of infectious disease. It will become even more important during a pandemic, so it’s a good idea to develop the habit now. And cough into a tissue or your sleeve instead of into your hands, while keeping your hands away from your nose, mouth and eyes.

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Influenza Pandemics continued

In addition, make a plan of your own in case you or your family has to stay at home because of the flu. Prepare an emergency information list with phone numbers for your physician, pharmacist, current prescriptions, allergies and medical conditions. Have such "stay-at-home" supplies available as water, soups, pain and fever reducing medicines, tissues, thermometer, tea or juice. A good guide on what to stock is available in our "Stay-At-Home" insert.

Influenza Pandemics And Your Community

An influenza pandemic could cause severe illnesses and deaths interrupting normal daily activities at work, home and school. Additionally, there will be intense pressure on medical professionals, scientists, health care providers, public health, and government agencies to work quickly to control the spread



of the infectious disease and provide effective treatment to minimize the effects of the pandemic. Hospitals could be overloaded with patients, signaling the need to draw on public health staff and volunteers from the Medical Reserve Corps for support.

Finding Pandemic Information In Your Community

The media will play an important role in helping medical and public health professionals provide the public with the latest information about prevention, treatment and more. Additionally, a public health hotline and a web site will provide constant updates. By learning the basics about pandemic flu and practicing infectious disease prevention techniques now, you will be better prepared in event of an influenza pandemic.

Avian Influenza (“Bird Flu”)

You have probably heard about avian influenza, or “bird flu,” in the news. Health officials are concerned that if the virus mutates – changes – it could cause a pandemic. A pandemic disease crosses continents and country borders and strains the world’s public health care systems.

Bird flu is a viral disease commonly seen in domestic poultry and wild birds. Currently, there is a dangerous strain of bird flu called “H5N1” this is causing concern for humans. People have no natural immunity to the H5N1 strain of bird flu.

In rare cases, people living in other countries have contracted H5N1 from domestic birds or their droppings. In these isolated cases, the virus has caused sickness and death. So far, there is no evidence that H5N1 has caused disease in people or birds in the U.S.

Occasionally, the virus can be passed from bird to human. Currently the H5N1 bird flu virus cannot easily spread from human to human.

What You Can Do

Practice healthy hygiene and safe food handling.

- Cook poultry at temperatures of at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit and eggs until the yolk is solid.
- Wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling chicken.
- Avoid touching dead birds. If you need to dispose of a wild bird it in a plastic bag and then into the garbage. Afterward, wash your hands thoroughly.
- Avoid exposure to bird droppings as a general health precaution.

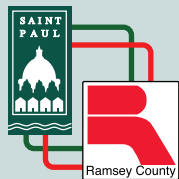


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- Stay aware. Pay attention to news about the bird flu.
- If you're planning on traveling abroad, check health advisories to determine if avian influenza is a concern in the countries you plan to visit at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>.



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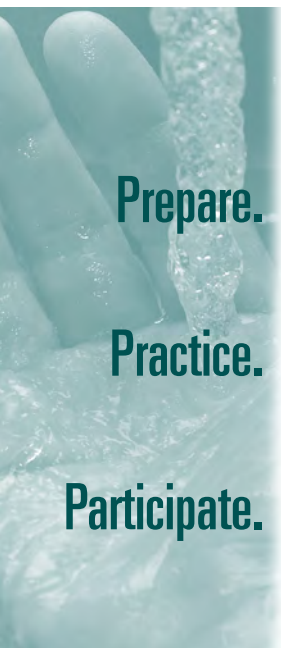
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Healthy Habits

Practicing health habits is always a good idea. These habits become especially important during public health emergencies such as an influenza (or “flu”) outbreak in your community.

The following steps limit the spread of germs at home, work and school.

- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds after using the bathroom, preparing food, eating, coughing, sneezing, nose blowing, taking out the garbage, changing a diaper and caring for the sick.
- Wash hands with soap and water by wetting them, applying soap, making lather and scrubbing, including underneath fingernails. Rinse and dry.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Minimize close contact with sick people.
- When sick stay home from school, work and social gatherings.



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- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, or your elbow — not your bare hand — when you cough or sneeze.
- Eat a balanced diet of vegetables, fruits, whole grain products, low-fat dairy products, lean meats, poultry, fish, and beans.
- Don't share personal items, such as towels, lipstick, toys or anything else that might be

contaminated with germs. Don't share food, utensils or beverage containers.

- Clean and sanitize household surfaces using a disinfecting household cleaner, a bleach solution (1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water) or rubbing alcohol.



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Safe Food Handling

Proper handling and cooking of chicken and other poultry provides protection against viruses such as Salmonella, E. coli, and potentially, avian influenza ("bird") virus. Although there is no evidence of the "H5N1" avian flu virus is in the U.S. you should take appropriate precautions to protect you and your family from eating contaminated poultry.

Additionally, a flood, blizzard or public health disaster could jeopardize the safety of the food in your home. To protect you and your family from foodborne illness practice these three behaviors — hand washing, cooking meats and eggs thoroughly and cleaning and sanitizing your cooking area.

Saint Paul-Ramsey County Public Health encourages the following guidelines in each of these areas.

Hand Washing

- Wet your hands with warm running water, apply soap, clean fingernails, and rub hands together for at least 20 seconds.
- Rinse hands well under running water.
- Dry hands using a paper towel or air dryer.

Cooking Food

- Have a food thermometer on hand. Verify that meats have been cooked to the recommended minimum internal temperature on the packaging, or at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Cook eggs until the whites and yolks are solid. Avoid eating raw or lightly cooked eggs in such foods as raw cookie dough, homemade mayonnaise, and dressings made with raw eggs.



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Cleaning and Sanitizing

- First, clean all surfaces in the kitchen with hot soapy water.
- Then, sanitize with a disinfectant such bleach, ammonia or rubbing alcohol. (Never mix those disinfectants together.) Sanitizing is the only way to remove germs from a surface. Use 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water.



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Stay-at-home Supplies

Many potential public health emergencies will direct the public to stay in their homes and neighborhoods. You and your family need to be prepared.

A good strategy is to occasionally buy canned goods, bottled water and non-perishables at the grocery and store them in a cool, dry place in your home. A two week supply is recommended. Also keep a list of medical prescriptions, important papers, and a communication plan readily accessible.

Here's a checklist you can use to prepare for emergencies.

Food and Water

- Bottled water
- Canned or dried meats, nuts, fruits, vegetables and soups
- Rice and noodles
- Canned juices or sports drinks
- Dry cereal or granola
- Crackers
- Peanut butter
- Powdered milk
- Protein and fruit bars



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Medical and Health Care

- Fever thermometer (extra batteries for digital thermometers)
- Copies of prescriptions (medicine and eyeglass) for each person in the household
- Prescribed medical supplies (such as glucose and blood pressure monitoring devices, oxygen and nebulizers)
- Medicine for fever and pain, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen
- Anti-diarrheal medicine
- Vitamins

Other Emergency Supplies

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Portable radio and extra batteries
- Manual (hand-operated) can opener
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- A traditional phone that does not require a battery to operate
- Soap
- Tissues, toilet paper, disposable diapers and feminine hygiene products
- Pet food, baby food, breastfeeding supplies and other items to meet your family's specific needs
- Plastic garbage bags
- Cash
- Copies of your health insurance cards and numbers, immunization (vaccines, shots) records, and documents to verify residency

Tips for storing food and water:

- Do not buy or use dented cans.
- Use and replace items on a regular basis to ensure freshness.
- Do not store items past expiration dates on product labels.

In addition, organize your financial information with a financial first aid kit at http://operationhope.org/fileupload/File/effak_english.pdf



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