

**POSSIBLE IMPACT OF AVIAN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC
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NCFDA continues to be involved with planning with the NC Department of Public Health, Medical Epidemiology Division, relating to the role of funeral service in the event of a possible influenza pandemic.

According to the World Health Organization an influenza pandemic will occur when a new influenza virus appears against which the human population has no immunity. Multiple, simultaneous epidemics worldwide will result with the potential for enormous numbers of deaths and illness.

Influenza is a highly contagious respiratory virus that is responsible for annual epidemics in the United States and other countries. Each year, approximately 200,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 die in our country from influenza infection or a secondary complication. During an influenza pandemic, these numbers could be much higher.

During the 20th century, three influenza pandemics occurred. The "Spanish" influenza pandemic of 1918 killed over 500,000 people in the United States and had a worldwide mortality of 20 to 40 million. The 1918 pandemic was notorious for its predilection for healthy young adults. After 1918, two global outbreaks of influenza A occurred. In 1957, Asian influenza caused approximately 70,000 deaths in the United States. During the Hong Kong pandemic in 1968-69, mortality in the United States was estimated at 33,000 deaths, with 51 million Americans affected by influenza and a total economic burden of \$3.9 billion.

Based on observations from previous pandemics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has estimated that the economic losses in the United States associated with the next pandemic will range from approximately \$71 billion to \$166 billion. The level of economic loss will depend on the attack rate of the virus and the resulting morbidity and mortality.

The impact of an influenza pandemic on the healthcare system could be devastating. It has been estimated that in the United States with a population over 290 million, a moderate pandemic could result in 90 million people becoming ill; 45 million outpatient visits; 800,000 hospitalizations; and 200,000 deaths. The potential for high levels of morbidity and mortality, coupled with the significant disruption to society, make planning for the next influenza pandemic imperative.

The purpose of planning for pandemic influenza is to:

- reduce mortality
- reduce morbidity
- minimize social disruption

The threat of pandemic influenza is not as much a question of if, but a question of when.

Pandemic influenza planning efforts are underway across the globe. Many different entities need to plan. Federal, state, and local governments are planning, but planning must take place in hospitals, businesses, schools, and volunteer organizations, just to name a few.

Here in the United States, the federal government has been working diligently to plan for a pandemic. They are funding research to produce a pandemic vaccine which could be manufactured quickly in response to an influenza pandemic. They are stockpiling medications and medical equipment to distribute throughout the country. They are providing resource materials to the public as well as those groups that need to be actively planning for a pandemic.

In North Carolina, the planning efforts have been ongoing for several years. The North Carolina Pandemic Influenza Response Plan addresses critical tasks that must take place in response to a pandemic: surveillance, vaccine and antiviral distribution, medical surge capacity, community containment measures, and communications. There has also been planning around mental health support, legal authority and travel-related issues.

The North Carolina Division of Public Health (NC DPH) has recently begun the task of planning for the "worst case scenario" which includes mass fatality planning. A moderate pandemic could result in 6,700 deaths across our state from pandemic influenza; many of these may occur in a six to eight week period. A severe pandemic could result in a significantly higher number of deaths.

Funeral homes across the state may face challenges during an influenza pandemic, especially if it manifests in a severe form. NC DPH is working with the North Carolina Board of Funeral Service to address these challenges. Funeral service personnel should inquire locally regarding the planning that is taking place by public health, emergency management, and the healthcare sector.

Suggested Resources

The US Department of health and Human Services maintains a website with planning tools and resources that is updated regularly:

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov>

The North Carolina Pandemic Influenza Response Plan can be found at the North Carolina Division of Public Health website.

<http://www.ncpublichealth.com>

Guidelines for the Management of Mass Fatalities during an Influenza Pandemic have been developed by the Public Health Agency of Canada. The pdf version of these guidelines can be accessed at the link below.

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cpip-pclcpi/pdf-cpip-03/cpip-appendix-i.pdf>