

Pandemic Flu – It's Time to Prepare

It is difficult to predict when the next influenza pandemic will occur or how severe it will be. Health professionals are concerned that the continued spread of a highly pathogenic avian H5N1 virus across eastern Asia and other countries represents a significant threat to human health worldwide. The H5N1 virus has raised concerns about a potential human pandemic because:

- It is especially virulent.
- It is being spread by migratory birds.
- It can be transmitted from birds to mammals and in some limited circumstances to humans.
- Like other influenza viruses, it continues to evolve.
- There has been only isolated human-to-human transmission of the disease, but the concern is that H5N1 will evolve into a virus capable of widespread human-to-human transmission.

As a Presbyterian woman...spiritual leader...community member...

What can you do to prepare?

Seeking to inform, not to frighten. National Health Ministries has gathered the latest information through the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization, and other reliable sources on their Web site.

www.pcusa.org/nationalhealth/healthinfo/pandemic.htm

The Web site contains resources to help members understand the level of a possible threat and to help them prepare. Presbyteries and congregations can be a communication network – a wonderful source of information – especially for people who may not be connected to other health information sources. A planning team is currently developing a denominational response and additional resources that will be useful in the face of a pandemic.

Education improves the chance of prevention and survival. Presbyteries and churches are encouraged to organize now and design plans for communication, alternative services, for identification of members most at risk and support mechanisms for all members of the church, including pastors.

Often, it is what we do not understand that frightens us most. Keeping Presbyterians up-to-date with reliable information and passing along the preparedness recommendations can help keep members from feeling as though they have no control.