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## Planning for a pandemic

During a communicable disease pandemic, primary care physicians and their office staffs will be in the frontlines of response. Critical to your response will be your ability to continue to provide services. In an influenza pandemic, it is unlikely that a vaccine will be available during a first wave of illness, and staff absenteeism may be as high as 40% and may affect your practice's ability to continue to see patients. Now is the time to plan for how you will continue to provide services, what you will operate as essential functions, and how you will protect your office workers. The goal in a pandemic is to keep the minimally sick at home and away from the ER as much as possible, leaving those areas open for only the mostly severely ill patients.

### Prepandemic/interpandemic period

During the prepandemic/interpandemic period, do the following:

- Confirm that you have adequate, current personal disability insurance
- Acquaint yourself with current clinical information regarding the recognition, treatment, and prevention of transmission of influenza
- Educate all staff members about pandemic influenza
- Ensure that your family will be looked after in a pandemic so that you can continue to work
- Provide an annual influenza vaccination to all office staff members each fall
- Provide an annual influenza vaccination to all eligible patients each fall

## Appendix A

- Provide one dose of polysaccharide pneumococcal vaccine to all eligible patients (those over age 65 and those with chronic health problems)
- Provide a conjugate pneumococcal vaccine series to infants

### Prepandemic/pandemic period

During the prepandemic/pandemic period, do the following:

- Reinforce good hygiene practices among staff members and patients
- Post signs advising patients to check in with reception upon arrival
- Separate the reception staff from patients with Plexiglas, or ensure a distance of at least 3 feet between reception and patients
- Post cough/sneeze etiquette stations in the waiting area
- Provide liquid soap and paper towels in patient washrooms and at staff sinks
- Provide the staff with small bottles of alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Monitor staff illness and make sure staff members with influenza-like illness remain off work
- Develop a contingency plan to address staff shortages; consider the use of volunteers

### Pandemic period

During the pandemic period, do the following:

- Ensure enhanced hygiene practices and social distancing to prevent the spread of pandemic influenza.
- Assign a staff member to coordinate pandemic planning and to monitor public health advisories.
- Maintain copies of pandemic educational material and “self-care guides” for patients. These are available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- Telephone-triage all patient requests for visits.
- Postpone all nonessential visits, such as routine checkups.
- If possible, schedule all patients with influenza-like illness during designated time slots.
- If possible, provide a separate entrance and waiting area for patients with influenza-like illness, or separate patients with influenza-like illness by 3 feet from others in the waiting room.

- Remove all magazines, books, and toys from the waiting area.
- Eliminate or decrease the use of shared items by patients, such as pens, clipboards, and phones.
- Minimize the amount of time spent in the waiting room by patients with influenza-like illness.
- If possible, designate one exam room for all patients with influenza-like illness.
- Assign a staff member who has recovered from pandemic influenza to care for patients with influenza-like illness.
- Plan for the disposition of all patients with influenza-like illness:
  - Home with “self-care guide” (preprinted guidelines are available from the CDC)
  - Home with home care (know of services that are available prior to an outbreak)
  - Referral to alternate care site (keep aware of what sites are available on an ongoing basis)
  - Admission to acute care facility (many facilities may be overcrowded and on diversion)
- When referring a patient with influenza-like illness, notify the receiving facility in advance.
- Clean waiting areas, exam rooms used by patients with influenza-like illness, and frequently touched surfaces, such as doorknobs, at least twice daily and when visibly soiled.
- Ensure that cleaners are active against viruses. Avoid vacuuming and dry dusting; “damp” dust only.
- Maintain at least one week’s supply of soap, paper towels, hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, and surgical masks ahead of an outbreak.

CDC’s pandemic scale		
Interpandemic phase New virus in animals, no human cases	Low risk of human cases	1
	Higher risk of human cases	2
Pandemic alert New virus causes human cases	No or very limited human-to-human transmission	3
	Evidence of increased human-to-human transmission	4
	Evidence of significant human-to-human transmission	5
Pandemic	Efficient and sustained human-to-human transmission	6