

# **Pandemic Plan for the Church**

## *Ministering to the Community in a Time of Crisis*

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### **Caring for the Sick**

#### **Part One**

#### **Disclaimer**

The objective of this document is to provide instructions to care for the sick in the event of such a pandemic. It is not meant to take the place of actual medical advice from a healthcare professional. To reiterate, **this information is for educational purposes only and does not constitute professional medical advice or diagnosis.**

#### **Risks to Consider**

This section by no means is a substitute for professional medical help. This advice is written with regards to a pandemic with the cataclysmic effects of the 1918 Influenza. Today we are blessed with a robust healthcare system that can be easily accessed. However, if such an event took place, the healthcare system would be overwhelmed. This is meant as guidance and not meant to take the place of a professional healthcare provider. Although this section covered the caring for those that are sick, please be sure to incorporate the proper protection measures explained in the section “Infection Control.”

As described in the section, “The Role of the Church in a Pandemic,” it was clearly stated that Christianity grew through disasters when Christians took care of their neighbors and shared the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Caring for the sick is a ministry that Christ exemplified and calls us to perform. Jesus said caring for one of these is as though caring for Himself (Matthew 25:34-40). However, calling on Christians to care for people in a pandemic situation is asking them to put their own lives at risk dependent on the lethality of the circulating virus. A deep, personal conviction must be present to serve in this manner.

#### **Caring for the Sick**

Studies have shown that even basic health care such as adequate water, food, and warmth can result in a much higher percentage rate of survival from a disease. During the 1918 Influenza, it was determined that many died simply because there was no one to look after the sick and provide them these basic essential needs.

Until an actual pandemic occurs and the pathophysiology (the progression of the disease in the human body) is determined, the elements of caring for the sick may change dependent on the process of the disease. This section will be based on caring for a person with seasonal influenza with complications of fever, cough, pneumonia, nausea, vomiting, and dehydration. All

similar symptoms of the HPAI H5N1. For more information on preventing a cytokine storm that can cause acute respiratory distress, please see the section “Preventing a Cytokine Storm.”

Please keep in mind personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn at all times when caring for a loved one at home or assisting in an alternative care facility. For more information on PPE, please see the section “Personal Protective Equipment” in the document titled “Infection Control.”

## **How to Protect Yourself**

If a vaccine is available, consider becoming vaccinated against the circulating strain. However, it is expected that if a pandemic were to arise, it could take months for an effective vaccine to be developed, manufactured, and distributed. Due to this, below are listed other non-pharmaceutical ways to protect yourself and others:

- Good hand hygiene – wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you sneeze or cough.
- Use disposable paper towels for hand washing, or designate cloth towels to family members.
- Use an alcohol-based hand rub if soap is not available.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, throw the tissue away in a waste basket.
- If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into the sleeve of your bent elbow.
- Instruct others to use good sneeze and cough etiquette.
- Avoid being close up and face to face with someone who is sick – try to keep a six-foot distance between you and the patient.
- Place the chin of a small child on your shoulder in case they cough or sneeze
- Do not share personal household items such as towels, bedding, pillow, or eating and drinking utensils.
- Contact your healthcare provider about taking antiviral medication for both the patient and yourself.
- Wear a face mask or respirator.
- Place a face mask on the patient as well.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as tables, doorknobs, countertops, etc.
- Stay healthy yourself, eat good foods, drink plenty of fluids, and get ample rest.

When caring for the sick keep these in mind:

- If possible, avoid having someone with increased risks to be a caregiver, such as a pregnant woman.
- If possible, have only one member in the household be the caregiver.
- Ensure good ventilation in common areas of the house, open windows in kitchen, living areas, and bathrooms.
- Do not have sick people provide care for infants, children, or the elderly.
- Monitor yourself and family members for flu symptoms and follow up with your healthcare provider.
- Form these habits now.

## **Personal Protection Equipment**

Influenza is spread mostly from person-to-person through droplets in coughs and sneezes of an infected person. You can acquire the disease from breathing in airborne droplets. Another manner in which you can contract the flu is by touching a contaminated surface then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth before washing your hands. Remember, influenza viruses can survive on surfaces such as counter tops, doorknobs, and telephones for hours.

If you are caring for a sick person diagnosed with influenza or pandemic influenza, protecting yourself is vital to remaining healthy for the two of you. In addition to good hand hygiene the following standard precautions should be taken:

- Clean, non-sterile gloves
- Face mask
- Goggles or face shield
- Clean gown – a disposable gown is recommended, but a fabric gown can be washed in bleach.

In addition to donning these items yourself, consider putting a face mask on the patient when in close proximity.

For more information about hand hygiene, please see the “Proper Hand Hygiene” section in the the chapter titled “Infection Control”. In the same chapter, please review the section, “Personal Protective Equipment. In addition, for more information about laundry please see the section, “Laundry” in the document titled “Disinfecting Surfaces”.

## **Isolation, Quarantine, Incubation and Contagious Periods**

Isolation and quarantine are strategies for separating individuals with a confirmed contagious disease.

Isolation – applies to individuals who are sick or have tested positive for a contagious disease. It involves separating them, often at home or in a hospital, to prevent the spread of the virus to others. It is used when a person is sick with a contagious disease, such as COVID-19, SARS, Ebola, or Avian Influenza.

Quarantine – applies to separating individuals who have been exposed to a contagious disease but are not yet sick. This measure helps prevent the spread of the virus that might occur before a person knows they are infected. It is used when a person has been in close contact (e.g., within six feet for 15 minutes or more) with someone who has a contagious disease. This individual should stay home, separate from others, monitor their health, and follow directions from their local health department. It is usually based on the incubation period of the particular virus.

Incubation Period – is the time between exposure to a pathogen and the first appearance of symptoms. Common respiratory illnesses can be spread even before a person develops symptoms.

Contagious Period is the timeframe when an infected person can transmit a disease to others. It often begins 1-2 days before symptoms appear and can last 5-7 days after the sickness starts. For many respiratory illnesses, the highest risk of transmission is within the first three days of symptoms.<sup>i</sup>

If your symptoms are severe or are returning, you may need to stay home longer; if you never had symptoms, take extra precautions for a full 10 days.

When to End Isolation (General Guideline):

- You can end isolation if you're fever-free (without meds) for 24 hours and symptoms are improving.
- Crucially, wear a high-quality mask around others through Day 10: and avoid close contact with high-risk individuals.

### Seasonal Influenza

Incubation period for seasonal influenza is typically 1-4 days after exposure to the virus. Symptoms can appear rapidly.

Isolation for seasonal influenza should be at least 24 hours after fever has resolved (without the use of fever reducing medication) and symptoms are improving. Individuals are most contagious during the first three days of illness.<sup>ii</sup>

Contagious period – you can spread the flu from one day before symptoms appear and up to five to seven days after becoming sick.

### COVID-19

The incubation period for COVID-19 typically ranges from 2 -14 days after exposure to the virus. Symptoms often appear withing 3-5 days on average.<sup>iii</sup>

Isolation for COVID-19 should take place for at least 24 hours after fever has resolved (without the use of fever reducing medication) and symptoms are improving. There is no longer a standard 5-day isolation period.<sup>iv</sup>

COVID-19 is typically contagious for 1–2 days before symptoms start and up to 8–10 days after, with the highest risk in the first few days of illness. Individuals with weakened immune systems may remain contagious longer.<sup>v</sup>

### H5N1

The incubation period for H5N1 (avian influenza) in humans is typically 3 to 5 days, though it can range from 2 to 10 days, with some reports suggesting up to 17 days. Due to this variability, exposed individuals should monitor for symptoms for 10 days.

People exposed to H5N1 should monitor for symptoms for 10 days after their last exposure and immediately isolate if symptoms develop. Symptomatic individuals must isolate at home, away from others, and seek medical evaluation to confirm infection, as the incubation period is generally 3 to 10 days.<sup>vi</sup>

The contagious period for H5N1 (bird flu) in humans is generally considered to be from one day before symptom onset until the resolution of illness. While often similar to the one-week duration of seasonal flu, infected individuals may remain contagious for several weeks in severe cases.<sup>vii</sup>

### **Where to Place the Sick Person**

Place the sick person in a room separate from others:

- A spare bedroom with its own bathroom is preferable.
- Do not place the person in a room shared by others, especially common living areas.
- The room should have good ventilation.
- Keep the door closed.
- Limit visitors to just the caregiver.
- Avoid close contact; keep a distance of six feet if possible.

The room and the bathroom should be cleaned daily. Please see the chapter on “Infection Control” for more information on “Disinfecting Surfaces”.

If the infected person must enter common areas or come in contact with others, they should wear a face mask, cover their mouth when coughing or sneezing, and practice hand hygiene. The sick person should stay home and keep away from others as much as possible for at least twenty-four hours after the fever is gone without use of any fever reducing medications.

## Signs and Symptoms of Influenza

Signs and symptoms of an illness are ways to discern and help diagnose an illness in a person. Signs are objective, observable, or measurable indicators such as a fever, rash, or high blood pressure, swelling, coughing, vomiting, etc. Symptoms are the subjective experiences reported by the patient, such as pain, dizziness, fatigue, nausea, numbness, etc.

Many illnesses share in their various signs and symptoms, such as influenza and COVID-19. Some people may present with mild cases and others more severe. Some may present with all the symptoms, and some only a few. Many times, it is difficult for a healthcare provider to diagnose an illness without a definitive test such as flu, COVID, or strep.

If a pandemic were to occur, and healthcare providers were overwhelmed, many would diagnose influenza simply by the symptoms. Of course, these signs and symptoms are for existing influenzas. Dependent on the pathogen that causes a pandemic, these may change.

Some signs and symptoms for seasonal influenza include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Congestion, runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Headache
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

Some complications of the flu include:

- Bacterial infections
- Pneumonia
- Ear or sinus infections
- Dehydration
- Worsening of existing medical conditions

If the patient is an infant, is elderly, or has a condition that may need special care, contact their health care provider. Some pre-existing conditions to which to be concerned are:

- Heart condition

- Congestive heart failure (CHF)
- COPD
  - Asthma
  - Emphysema
  - Chronic bronchitis
- Diabetes
- Pregnancy

Your healthcare provider may prescribe antiviral medications, especially for those who are at high risk for developing complications. Separate those with these conditions from sick patients to avoid them contracting the disease.

### **Signs and Symptoms for COVID-19**

COVID-19 is spread more easily than influenza. It may cause more serious illness in some people and can even take longer before symptoms show. Signs and symptoms for COVID-19 are very similar to the seasonal flu, except a variant may be a new loss of taste/smell. Symptoms may vary with variants of the virus in circulation. In some cases, symptoms can last for weeks or months, this is known as long COVID. Signs and symptoms for COVID-19 may include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Cough
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- New loss of taste or smell

### **Signs and Symptoms of the Current HPAI H5N1**

Patients with the current strain of HPAI H5N1 circulating have presented with the following symptoms. These may change depending on any mutations the virus may have undergone at the time it becomes a pandemic. Notice many are similar to seasonal influenza.

Genetic sequencing of a human H5N1 sample taken from a patient who was exposed to sick cattle showed that the transmission results might involve the eyes and perhaps not the upper respiratory tract. Notably, the patient reported only conjunctivitis with no respiratory symptoms.

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Conjunctivitis, also known as pink eye, is the inflammation of the clear membrane (conjunctiva) over the white surface of the eye and the lining of the inside of the eyelids. This causes redness, itching, discharge, and swelling.



Conjunctivitis

Other signs and symptoms of the HPAI H5N1 may include:

- Fever (over 100.4° degrees F)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Aching bones, joints and muscles
- Nasal congestion, and runny nose
- Bleeding from the nose
- Bleeding from the gums
- Malaise
- Loss of appetite/Nausea
- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Neurological changes
- Altered level of consciousness/Seizures
- Cold sweats and chills
- Headache
- Sleeping difficulties
- Lower respiratory tract infection, which includes breathing difficulties
- Pneumonia
- Sputum is sometimes bloody

- Chest pain
- Tachycardia
- Myocardial infarction
- Hypotension
- Acute encephalitis
- Acute Respiratory Distress
  - Crackling sound on inhalation
- Respiratory failure
- Multi-organ dysfunction

Deterioration is rapid.

## **Prescription Medications**

Antiviral medications don't cure influenza but can sometimes help lessen flu symptoms; they also require a prescription. Most people do not need antiviral drugs to fully recover from the flu; however, some people are at a higher risk to develop complications. These people may benefit from antiviral medications. Antiviral medications are available for persons one year of age and older. Ask your healthcare provider whether you need this type medication.

However, as discussed in an earlier section, the avian influenzas, H5N1, H3N2, and other influenza A viruses have shown resistance to neuraminidase inhibitor antiviral medications such as Oseltamivir (Tamiflu). As also mentioned, in the near future, the availability of these antivirals may be more regulated in order to maintain the efficacy of these medications in the event of a pandemic.

Influenza infections can lead to or coincide with bacterial infections, such as bacterial pneumonia. Therefore, some people will also need to take antibiotics. Check with your healthcare provider if you develop worsened symptoms.

## **When to Seek Medical Attention**

While many illnesses can be managed at home, there are certain signs and symptoms that indicate the need for professional medical attention. Some of these include:

- Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, persistent wheezing
  - Lips or face turn a bluish color
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- Confusion or unresponsiveness
  - Difficulty waking up

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- Severe or persistent vomiting
- High fever that climbs above 104°F or a lower fever that persists more than three days.

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<sup>i</sup> “Preventing Spread of Respiratory Viruses When You’re Sick” Respiratory Illnesses, Centers For Diseases Control (CDC), August 18, 2025, <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/precautions-when-sick.html>, Accessed February 17, 2026

<sup>ii</sup> “Preventing Seasonal Flu,” U.S. Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC), Preventing Seasonal Flu, September 26, 2025, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevention/index.html#:~:text=If%20you%20are%20sick%2C%20limit,using%20fever%2Dreducing%20medication>), Accessed February 17, 2026

<sup>iii</sup> “What is the COVID-19 Incubation Period?,” Sarah Hudgens, Health.com, February 11, 2026, <https://www.health.com/covid-incubation-period-11704405>, Accessed February 17, 2026

<sup>iv</sup> “Preventing Spread of Respiratory Viruses When You’re Sick” Respiratory Illnesses, Centers For Diseases Control (CDC), August 18, 2025, <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/precautions-when-sick.html>, Accessed February 17, 2026

<sup>v</sup> “How Long are You Contagious After Testing Positive for Covid-19?” PfizerForAll, <https://www.pfizerforall.com/covid-19/education/how-long-are-you-contagious-after-positive-covid-19-test>, Accessed February 17, 2026

<sup>vi</sup> “Recommendations for Influenza A(H5N1) Infection Prevention and Control,” Pennsylvania Department of Health” Last updated June 2024, <https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/health/documents/topics/documents/diseases-and-conditions/flu/HAI-IPC%20Quick%20Reference%20on%20H5N1%20for%20Healthcare%20Settings.pdf#:~:text=Notify%20occupational%20health%20services%20and%20their%20supervisor,for%20signs%20and%20symptoms%20of%20respiratory%20illness.>, Accessed February 17, 2026

<sup>vii</sup> “Signs and Symptoms of Bird Flu in People” Centers for Diseases and Control, Bird Flu, December 20,2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/signs-symptoms/index.html>, Accessed February 17, 2026

<sup>viii</sup> “CDC Sequencing of H5N1 Avian Flu Samples from Patient Yields New Clinical Clues” Lisa Schnirring, CIDRAP, University of Minnesota, April 3, 2024, <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/avian-influenza-bird-flu/cdc-sequencing-h5n1-avian-flu-samples-patient-yields-new-clinical-clues>, Accessed February 18, 2026