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Pandemic Flu Preparation: Food and Water Supplies and Storage

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"Pandemics are global in nature, but their impact is local. When the next pandemic strikes, as it surely will, it is likely to touch the lives of every individual, family, and community. Our task is to make sure that when this happens, we will be a Nation prepared."

Michael O. Leavitt, Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Yes, we can expect our lives to be "touched" by an avian influenza pandemic. Our diets and daily routines will be altered, and the concern of all of us will be to protect ourselves and our families. Since we don't know how serious the pandemic may be in our communities, it only pays to prepare. Advance planning can make our homes safe and comfortable. It's not an overwhelming task, and there are many guidelines to help. Look at it this way: The better we are prepared, the better we will respond and rebound, and when it's all over, the better and stronger will be our families, community, and state.

Food, water, supplies to stockpile

How much food, water, and paper products will you or your family need to get you through one or two or even three waves of pandemic flu? You may not be able to go shopping. If you do go, there may be little to buy. There are several ways to approach building your inventory. (Sample lists are in ExEx 13002.)

1. Keep a diary of what you and your family use of essential supplies such as prescriptions, tissues, toilet paper, tampons, diapers, shampoo, etc. in a week. Do this for several weeks and you will have a handle on what you will need for 2 to 6 weeks. We are recommending a minimum of 2 and preferably 6 weeks of stored supplies and medicines.
2. Estimating food supplies can be more difficult. You have several options here:
 - a. Keep a diary of what your family consumes in a week—the types and amounts—and then double the amounts for 2 weeks of storage or multiply by 6 for 6 weeks storage. Where possible, replace the perishable foods with nonperishable foods or select an appropriate substitute.
 - b. The USDA has a website called My Pyramid at <http://www.mypyramid.gov/mypyramid/index.aspx> that helps you customize food-group servings needed per day or weekly, given age, gender, and activity level. Then you can multiply by 2 or 6 to determine the quantities of food to store for 2 and 6 weeks and can develop a food inventory that will meet the diverse nutritional needs of your family.
 - c. There are websites that will provide the exact amounts of foods required for a given individual for

a given time frame. These sites tend to provide amounts of staples such as wheat, rice, dried beans and may or may not include canned or other ready-to-eat foodstuffs available today. They do, however, give you an excellent starting point for building a food inventory. An example website is <http://www.providentliving.org/channel/0,11677,1706-1,00.html>

Managing your food supply

After making a list of needed items, the most painless way to build your supply of food is to buy a few items each week.

For example, buy an extra can of tuna, a box of crackers, and batteries the next time you go shopping. Next time, add other some other items to your grocery list. Budgeting for a pandemic is discussed in ExEx13005.

Almost as important as food are proper storage containers for bulk items to keep them fresh and free from rodents and insects. You will also need a food/supply inventory system to label and rotate food/supplies in your cupboards/pantry or storage area. Develop a system that is easy for you and your family to understand and use on a daily basis.

For more information see Food Storage In the Home: <http://extension.usu.edu/files/foodpubs/fn502.pdf>

Water—how much and how to store?

It is recommended you store 1 gallon of water per person per day for cooking and drinking. In this case, more is better: 2 gallons per person per day for cooking, drinking and cleaning.

You may purchase water or store water; however, only use containers meant for water storage. In addition to

grocery stores and outlets, such containers also are available at hardware and camping stores.

Change water that is stored for emergency situations every 3 months to ensure that it is safe to drink.

All storage containers (except boxed water kits and Mylar bags) should be cleaned thoroughly with water and then rinsed again with a chlorine water solution (1 teaspoon 4-6% sodium hypochlorite per 1 gallon of water).

If, during an emergency, there is a question about the purity or safety of your water, treat it before using it. There are several methods for treating water:

1. Boiling: Bring to a rolling boil and boil for one minute. This method assumes you have fuel or electricity.
2. Purification tablets: Available at most sporting goods stores and drugstores.
3. Water purifier: Make sure you have a water purifier and not just a water filter.
4. Chlorination: Use 1/8 teaspoon of 4-6% sodium hypochlorite per gallon of water and let stand for 30 minutes. The water should have a slight bleach odor. If not, repeat the procedure. Read the label before using the bleach: Not all bleaches are the same concentration.

Extension Extras in this Pandemic Flu Preparation series:
ExEx13002, Hold family meetings
ExEx13003, Food and water supplies and storage
ExEx13004, If we don't have utilities how do we cook, keep things clean?
ExEx13005, Saving up for an emergency
ExEx13006, The workplace and the community

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