

## Understanding the Differences between Various Types of Flu

The word “flu,” another term for the influenza virus, is a common word. However, the differences between seasonal flu, avian flu, and pandemic flu are not clear to most people. These types of flu are not the same, and it’s important to know why.



### Seasonal Flu:

Seasonal flu is a respiratory illness that goes from person to person, usually in the winter months. People with seasonal flu often think that they have the common cold. Seasonal flu can cause fever, chills, dry cough, sore throat, and a runny or stuffy nose. It can also cause headache, muscle aches, and extreme fatigue. You can get a vaccine each year for the seasonal flu. The illness that people call "stomach flu" is not influenza.



### Avian Flu:

Avian, or bird, flu is caused by viruses. These viruses are in some wild birds naturally. The H5N1 type of bird flu that is currently in Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East kills poultry. It rarely spreads from birds to humans. If humans come into direct contact with birds that have the disease, they could get sick. People have little or no immune protection against bird flu because the viruses normally don’t infect humans. The H5N1 virus is not in the United States.



### Pandemic Flu:

Pandemic flu is a special situation. It happens when a new strain of flu breaks out. People have little or no immunity to this new kind of flu. It is easily spread from person to person and causes a worldwide outbreak, or pandemic, of serious illness. This has happened three times in the last century – 1918 to 1919, 1957 to 1958, and 1968 to 1969. No one can predict when the next pandemic flu will be. We don’t know which type of influenza will cause it. Right now, there is no pandemic flu, but world health officials are closely watching the H5N1 bird flu virus. Bird flu may be able to change into a form that can easily spread from person to person, which could cause a global outbreak.

The current H5N1 bird flu outbreak has caused about 200 human cases in the world. This is a small number of people compared with the large number of birds affected. Many people in the world come into close contact with birds, especially in areas where small backyard flocks and live markets are common.



Kentucky communities are getting ready for pandemic flu and have held many meetings about it across the state. The focus is on helping people in public health and emergency response to inform and involve leaders all over the state in the pandemic planning process.

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Prepared by: Anthony Pescatore, Poultry Specialist; Ricky Yeagan, Extension Associate; and Andrea Husband, Program Coordinator for Agroterrorism and Disaster Preparedness.  
For more information about pandemic flu, visit the University of Kentucky Pandemic Flu webpage at <http://www.ca.uky.edu/fcs/pandemicflu/>.

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