



## It's Flu Season

By Betsy Bransky

**T**here is a lot going on in the world today that has the potential for great impact on your health. Along with the need for awareness of flu season in general, you now have to think about the **Avian flu**. Here is the most recent information on line that can help you to know what you are dealing with and how best to prepare for it.

During the last several years, a number of people have become ill with a strain of influenza that normally affects birds. Most, if not all, of these people have contracted the illness directly from birds – not from humans. But for those who do get the virus, this strain of flu is especially dangerous, with a high death rate among those who become ill. **This virus has not been found in Maine**, but experts predict that it could reach North America by the end of the year. ([http://www.maine-flu.gov/ind\\_families.htm](http://www.maine-flu.gov/ind_families.htm))

The University of Maine Cooperative Extension has a great fact sheet online (<http://www.umext.maine.edu/AI/avianflue2.htm>) how to be prepared for the Avian flu. The following is an excerpt from this fact sheet.

“Avian flu has the greatest potential of becoming a pandemic flu of any flu. Pandemic flu is flu that causes a global outbreak of serious illness that spreads easily from person to person. **Currently there is no pandemic flu.**

Being prepared for emergencies is a responsibility we all share. Being prepared can ease the fears and reduce the impact of diseases and disasters. Although no one knows exactly when the next human pandemic flu outbreak will occur, there are basic preparation measures people can take, including practicing good hygiene and putting together a home emergency kit. Being prepared for emergencies is simply common sense.

The information below describes common flu symptoms, how it is spread, how to protect yourself and those close to you from getting the flu, and what to do if you get sick with flu-like symptoms.

· Flu symptoms include: fever, headache,

tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, diarrhea and vomiting.

- Flu is spread when a person who has the flu coughs, sneezes, or speaks and sends the flu virus into the air. The virus enters the nose, throat or lungs of a person and multiplies. Flu spreads less frequently when a person touches a surface that has flu viruses on it.
- Antibiotics like penicillin will not cure the flu. The single best way to protect against the flu is to get vaccinated each year. October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but you can still get vaccinated in December and later.
- Good health habits for avoiding the flu include: avoiding close contact with people who are sick; staying home from work, school and errands when you are sick; covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing may prevent those around you from getting sick; washing your hands often will help protect you from germs; avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth; getting plenty of sleep and physically activity; managing your stress; drinking plenty of fluids and eating nutritious food.
- Four antiviral medicines are available by prescription that will help prevent flu infection: Amantadine, Rimantadine, Zanamavir and Oseltamivir.
- If you get the flu: rest, drink plenty of liquids, and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

For more information from the CDC, go to Influenza (the Flu): Questions & Answers at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/>.

*Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>*