

## Key Facts about Pandemic Influenza

### ◆Pandemics come from:

- ◆ New viruses
- ◆ Viruses that can spread easily from person to person and cause disease

### ◆Flu pandemics typically occur every 25-30 years

### ◆In the 20th century there have been 3 pandemics:

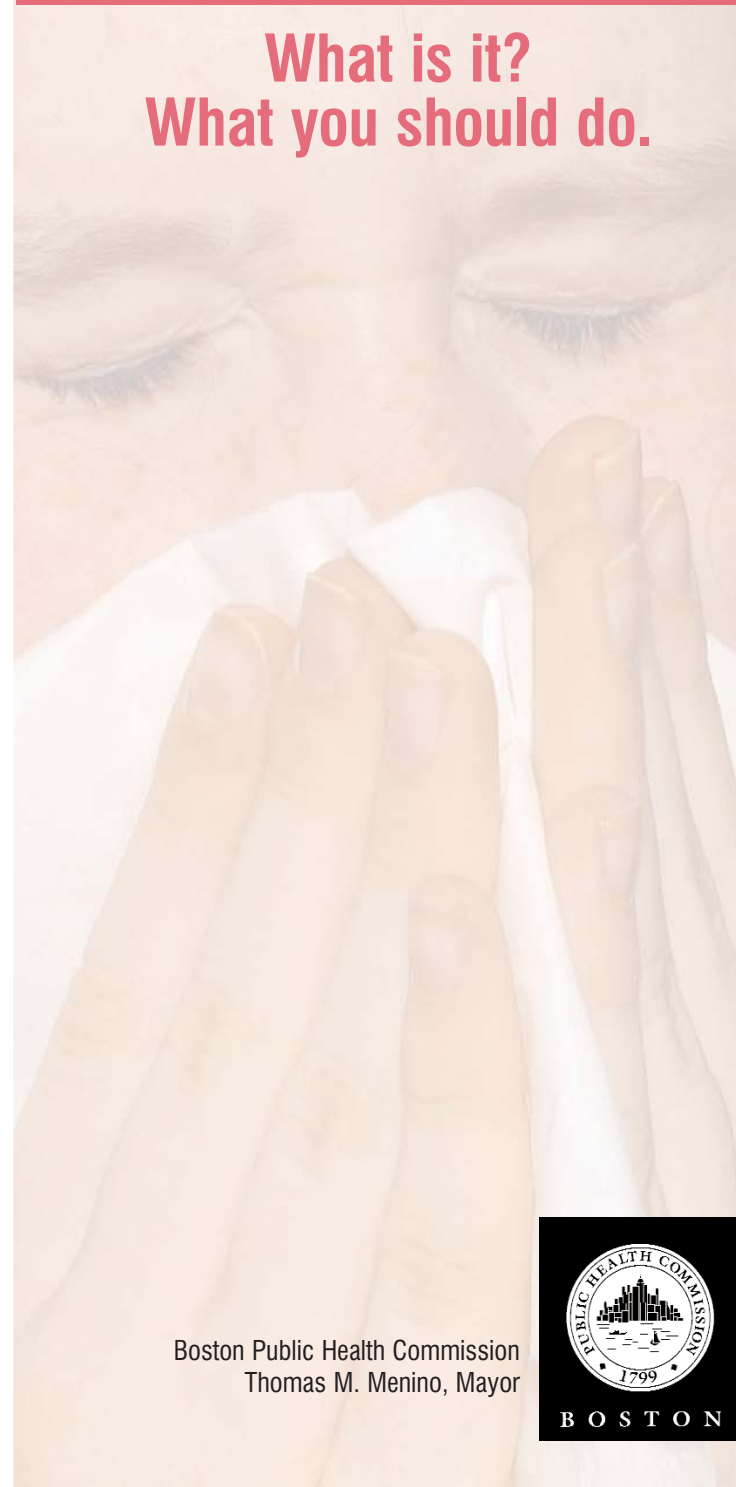
- ◆1918 Spanish Flu
- ◆1957 Asian Flu
- ◆1968 Hong Kong Flu

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# Pandemic Flu

**What is it?  
What you should do.**



Boston Public Health Commission  
Thomas M. Menino, Mayor



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## Basic Influenza Facts

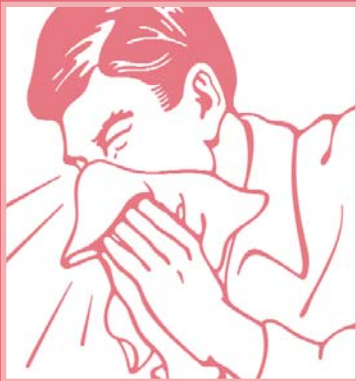
### What is influenza?

Influenza (“flu”) is a virus that typically affects the nose, throat and lungs. The illness usually lasts between three and seven days and symptoms include fever, headache, cough, aches and sore throat.

### How does pandemic flu start?

Flu viruses are constantly changing. A pandemic begins when a new flu virus emerges, causes disease in humans and is able to spread easily from person to person. More people get sick because they have never been exposed to this virus before and their bodies cannot fight it off. This allows the virus to spread widely and cause illness among many people—creating what is called a “pandemic.” The symptoms of pandemic flu are similar to those of ‘seasonal’ flu but can be more severe. New pandemic viruses often begin with a bird virus. Bird viruses don’t usually spread easily among people, but they can develop new characteristics that allow them to do so. This is more likely to happen when birds and humans live in close proximity to each other.

Cover your nose and mouth when you cough to prevent spreading the flu virus to others



## What is the difference between seasonal, avian and pandemic flu?

### Seasonal Flu

- ◆ **Seasonal flu** is a respiratory illness caused by an influenza virus, which spreads easily from person to person.
- ◆ Each year about 10% of the population becomes ill with seasonal flu.
- ◆ For most, the illness is unpleasant but not life threatening.
- ◆ The very young and those over 65 years old are at greater risk of serious complications. So are those with:
  - ◆ HIV/AIDS
  - ◆ Cancer
  - ◆ Other chronic conditions, such as kidney, lung or heart disease
- ◆ Annual flu vaccine is the best way to protect against seasonal flu.

### Avian flu

- ◆ **Avian flu** or “bird flu” is caused by avian influenza viruses, which occur naturally among birds but do not usually cause disease in humans.
- ◆ In recent avian flu outbreaks caused by H5N1 millions of birds have died or been killed.
- ◆ H5N1 bird flu was first reported to cause severe illness in humans in Asia in 1997.

### Pandemic flu

- ◆ **Pandemic flu** usually starts with a new flu virus (typically an animal flu virus like the bird flu).
- ◆ It causes a worldwide outbreak of serious illness that spreads from person to person.

- ◆ During the recent avian flu outbreaks, most humans who developed bird flu have had close contact with sick birds or their droppings.
- ◆ Currently, there is no flu pandemic.
- ◆ When flu pandemic occurs, as many as one in every four people can get sick.
- ◆ No vaccine is commercially available for pandemic flu—because no one can predict which virus will cause a pandemic.
- ◆ Once researchers know which virus is causing the pandemic, it usually takes about 4-6 months to produce an adequate vaccine.

### How to protect yourself and your family

There are several steps you can take to protect yourself and your family from influenza.

1. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. This may prevent those around you from getting sick.
2. Wash your hands often with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand cleanser.
3. Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
4. If you will be traveling to areas affected with bird flu, avoid live bird markets, farms or direct contact with birds. For additional information concerning travel, visit: [www.cdc.gov/travel/](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/).
5. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth because germs are often spread this way.
6. An annual flu vaccine can reduce your risk of getting seasonal flu, but it will not protect you from avian flu.
7. If you are ill with flu-like symptoms, stay home so you don't pass it to others.