

Preparing for the Swine Flu Pandemic

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is aware of the emergence of swine flu (Influenza A - H1N1) as a public health concern and that the U.S. government has declared a public health emergency. Government investigations are ongoing to determine the source and extent of the infection. As of April 29, 2009 the current level is stage 5.

Swine flu is thought to be spread by coughing, sneezing, or touching something with the virus on it. We encourage you to wash your hands frequently, cover your sneezes and coughs, and avoid others who appear ill.

We recommend that you do not travel at this time if you or a member of your family is exhibiting signs of the flu or if you have a compromised immune system.

-From PC(USA)

A state map of the confirmed cases of the swine flu plus more information on this pandemic is available at www.pandemicflu.gov.

Current level of influenza pandemic alert raised from phase 4 to 5

29 April 2009 -- Based on assessment of all available information and following several expert consultations, Dr Margaret Chan, WHO's Director-General raised the current level of influenza pandemic alert from phase 4 to 5. She stated that all countries should **immediately activate their pandemic preparedness plans**. At this stage, effective and essential measures include heightened surveillance, early detection and treatment of cases, and infection control in all health facilities.

[FAQ on Swine influenza](#)

[Full coverage of swine influenza](#)

[Statement by WHO Director-General](#) (Full letter)

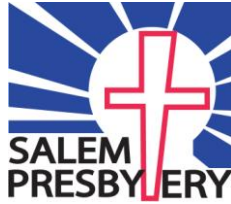
(Excerpt)

All countries should immediately activate their pandemic preparedness plans. Countries should remain on high alert for unusual outbreaks of influenza-like illness and severe pneumonia.

At this stage, effective and essential measures include heightened surveillance, early detection and treatment of cases, and infection control in all health facilities.

This change to a higher phase of alert is a signal to governments, to ministries of health and other ministries, to the pharmaceutical industry and the business community that certain actions should now be undertaken with increased urgency, and at an accelerated pace.

-Taken from the [World Health Organization](#)



Experts feel an influenza pandemic is likely and we need to prepare ourselves and our congregations. It might be as serious as the 1918 “Spanish flu.” As with any natural or human disaster, our churches and Presbytery will need to respond to our own needs, the needs of our most vulnerable members, and the many needs of those around us. The Health Ministries website of PCUSA states: “Often, it is what we do not understand that frightens us most. Keeping Presbyterians up-to-date with reliable information and passing along the preparedness recommendations can help keep members from feeling as though they have no control.”

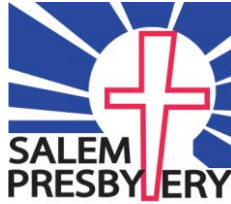
It may be overwhelming at first, but thinking ahead about how we will respond helps prepare for this or any other emergency. Regardless of when the global pandemic comes, as a minimum, we may be able to take better care of those who suffer from the regular flu this winter.

The three most important things that you can do to get ready are:

- Plan how you and your congregation could function in the event of a pandemic.
- Engage the creativity and resourcefulness of your congregation.
- Work with your local health department to learn their plans and procedures. Many people in government and business have already been developing plans, resources, and checklists.

As you begin to talk with your session and health leaders in your congregation, consider how your congregation already deals with health issues and unexpected events. The following questions may help to discern what could be done now, before a pandemic begins:

- How will you keep your church office and vital church programs going?
- What do you currently do for any emergency?
- How might you improve things that you will want to keep doing if there is a widespread influenza pandemic?
- What activities could be set aside?
- What ministries in your community would you strengthen?
- Do you know who your local resources are and where they are?
- Identify how you might partner with churches near you and maybe begin to do some activities together for other reasons.
- Do you know who has special needs, such as people serviced by home health agencies? How could your congregation help them?
- How could you do funerals and memorial services in a way that limits the spread of the virus?



We can change our behaviors now and start taking measures to reduce the impact of a pandemic by:

Brainstorm alternatives to shaking hands, hugging, or 'passing of the peace' that would be acceptable for your congregation. Identify the most vulnerable, possibly using the PCUSA form: (<http://www.pcusa.org/nationalhealth/downloads/pandemiccontacts.pdf>)

As a pastor, how will you minister to a congregation seriously impacted by a pandemic? Are your elders and deacons trained to help you, and are they comfortable praying with others? Their emotional support and "just being there" can be of tremendous benefit, and extend your capabilities. In whatever way is right, share these reflections with your session to stimulate discussion. If you have a parish nurse, health ministry, or medical professionals in your congregation, you may want to convene them soon as advisors for what will work best for your congregation. Like Noah, we need to pay attention and be prepared!

-Developed by the [Presbytery of Baltimore Pandemic Group](#)

Plan for Your Church

(Definition of stages taken from the World Health Organization website)

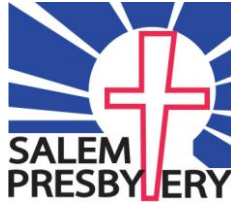
Stage 3: Humans are infected with a new disease, but no human-to-human spread.

Stage 4: Small clusters of human to human transmission but spread is highly localized suggesting the virus is not well adapted to humans.

Stage 5: Larger clusters of transmission but not yet fully transmissible (*Maximize efforts to contain or delay spread*)

Stage 6: Sustained transmission in the general population (*Minimize the impact of the pandemic*)

The World Health Organization has identified six stages of illness. We would suggest that certain tasks will need to be taken up and that certain programs and ministries will be impacted. Your planning group should begin with brainstorming the various impacts of a pandemic and you can also use the following lists:



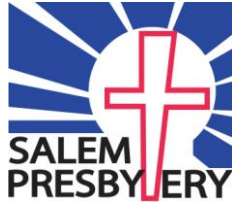
Possible Changes in Ministries and Programs:

- Ask staff to work from home
- Cancel meeting or begin using phone conference calls
- Cancel or change Sunday worship services, funerals, and weddings
- Cancel Church School Classes or Day Care
- Make home visits with the vulnerable to help them prepare and care for themselves
- Consider providing volunteers to care for the sick or their family members
- Refrain from “Passing the Peace” and communion by intinction
- Decide who will make hospital visits and how they prepare for them
- Cancel pot luck suppers, receptions, coffee hours, etc. change with each new stage

Possible Tasks:

- Create small decision making Task Force which can make decisions quickly
- Develop Adult Classes and Sermons that address the concerns and needs that arise with a pandemic
- Secure supply of protective clothing such as gloves and masks
- Identify vulnerable
- Explore alternative methods of delivering worship to the homes of members: VHS/DVD/web-casting
- Communicate Health Department information regarding disease and individual preparations
- Distribute suggestions from the PCUSA website such as the Individual/Family Preparation and Congregational Emergency Health Contact Form
- Consider setting up remote internet connections for staff
- Create care giver packets that assist those who are providing care to an ill person and therefore has limited mobility
- Create ecumenical response to growing pandemic to provide a unified Christian witness in your community
- Host flu shot clinics (when vaccine becomes available; predicted be no sooner than fall 2009)

-Developed by the [Presbytery of Baltimore Pandemic Group](#)



Resources:

PC (USA) National Health Ministries

<http://www.pcusa.org/nationalhealth/healthinfo/pandemic.htm>

Site has many valuable resources for preparing your church and family for a pandemic

Pandemic Flu

www.pandemicflu.gov

World Health Organization

www.who.int/en/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>