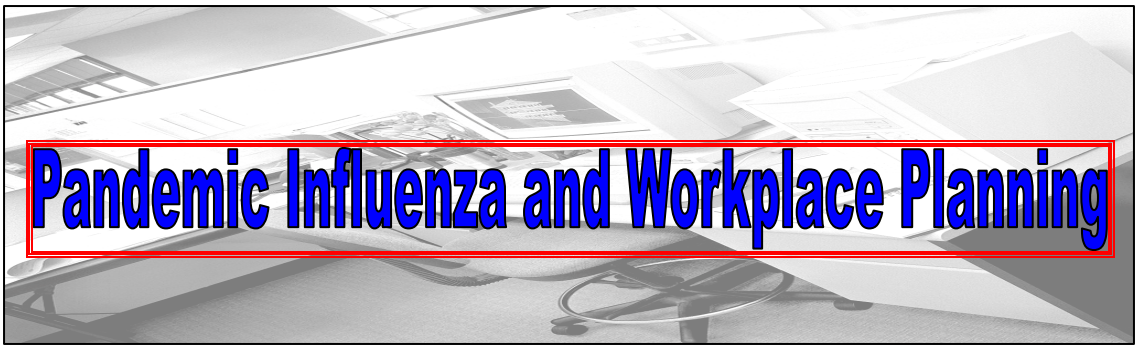

Pandemic influenza occurs when there is a new strain of influenza virus that causes high numbers of severe illnesses and passes easily from person to person. Because there is no natural immunity, the disease spreads rapidly throughout the world. Experts expect that absentee rates from work could reach as high as 40% during an influenza pandemic.

Avian influenza A (H5N1) virus, commonly known as "bird flu", is a strain of influenza that has caused illness and death among poultry worldwide and can potentially lead to an influenza pandemic if it mutates into a form easily transmitted from human to human. To date, avian influenza is not considered a threat to DOE employees, including those traveling to countries where the virus has affected poultry and a limited number of people who have been exposed to it in their immediate environs.

The federal government has released a pandemic influenza planning guide which outlines preparation activities that the Department of Energy must follow. Involvement from all offices within the Department of Energy is integral to successful workplace planning for a pandemic health crisis. DOE must continue to work to achieve its mission, while also ensuring the health and safety of employees. Basic guidance is provided below. For more detailed information, please visit http://www.opm.gov/pandemic/index.asp .

Employee Roles and Responsibilities

- Be ready for alternative work arrangements (i.e. telework and rotational assignments at open facilities)
- Be familiar with leave flexibilities (e.g., advanced leave, leave transfer programs)
- Protect sensitive information
- Stay in constant contact with management
- Prepare your family for coping with disruptions at schools and in the community

Supervisory Roles and Responsibilities

- Plan for short- and long-term disruptions
- Stay in constant contact with employees and leadership
- Be familiar with your organization's COOP/Pandemic Planning implementation plans