

It's in the newspaper and on television news. Avian Flu, Bird Flu, Pandemic Influenza. You hear about it more and more each day, but do you really understand what it means?

What is Bird Flu or Avian Flu? That I don't know, I wish I did know. There's not enough information out there. I know the bird flu is a big thing that is spreading through chickens and birds and everything and the avian flu I really have no idea.

Bird flu is another name for avian flu. Bird flu is an infection caused by bird or avian flu viruses.

Dr. Thomas Coleman, director of the Volusia County Health Department explains. Actually birds are the natural host for all influenza viruses anyway typically water fowl and shore birds so avian flu is just simply bird influenza if you will.

How is bird flu spread? Infected birds shed influenza virus in their saliva, nasal secretions, and feces. How many cases of bird flu are currently in the United States? As far as I know there's none in America right now. I've not heard of one case. Zero I think. In the United States there are currently no cases of bird flu, of avian influenza either in any animals or in humans.

What is pandemic influenza? An influenza pandemic is a global outbreak of disease that occurs when a new influenza "a" virus appears or emerges in the human population causing serious illness in people and then spreads easily from person to person worldwide.

Past influenza pandemics have led to high levels of illness, death, social disruption, and economic loss.

There have been 3 flu pandemics in the past 100 years. 1918-1919. The Spanish Flu. More than half a million people died in the United States. That's the highest number of known pandemic influenza deaths. 1968-1969 The Asian Flu caused about 70,000 deaths in the United States. 1968-1969 The Hong Kong Flu caused about 34,000 deaths in the United States. What a lot of people don't realize is that influenza in general is much more than just a common cold. It's potentially a very serious disease. Each year about 36,000 people in the United States die from influenza and over 200,000 are hospitalized. So it's not just sort of the common cold.

How do you protect yourself? Health officials recommend you continue to take the same precautions to protect yourself against avian flu as you would from colds and the seasonal flu.

Cover your nose or mouth with a tissue when sneezing, coughing, or blowing your nose. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use hand sanitizer. Stay home if you have a cough or fever. See your doctor as soon as possible if you have cough or fever or other flu like symptoms.

Health experts advise you to take time now to educate yourself about avian flu and pandemic influenza, and prepare now.

Additional information is available at www.pandemicflu.gov , www.cdc.gov or www.volusiahealth.com including preparedness checklists for schools, child care centers, businesses, faith based organizations and agencies as well as for your home. Or for a community presentation on pan flu, please contact the health department Office of Public Health Preparedness at (386) 274-0640 For Volusia Magazine, I'm Stefany Strong.