

Colorado



...a healthy place to live, work, play

Frequently Asked Questions:

Colorado's Preparations for Pandemic Influenza

What is Colorado's plan in the event of a pandemic influenza?

Colorado's pandemic influenza plan is available on the Web site of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment at www.cdphe.state.co.us/epr/panflusummary.html. The plan helps support agencies throughout the state in the event of a pandemic influenza. The state provides funding from federal grants to help local public health agencies prepare their communities. It often is said that all disasters and emergencies are local. The state is prepared to activate and mobilize its resources to assist throughout Colorado as needed. In addition, in the event of a pandemic, the state also can call on federal resources for assistance.

Who is in charge in Colorado in the event of a pandemic?

The governor has the ultimate authority. A 2000 state statute called for creation of a 22-member advisory committee, the Governor's Expert Emergency Epidemic Response Committee, to advise the governor in the event of a public health emergency. The committee's priorities include:

- Protecting human life (the committee's highest priority)
- Controlling the further spread of disease
- Meeting the immediate emergency needs of people (specifically medical services, shelter, food, water and sanitation)
- Restoring and continuing operations of facilities and services essential to the health, safety and welfare of people and the environment
- Preserving evidence for law enforcement investigations and prosecutions

This committee of health and medical experts would convene rapidly in the event of a disaster emergency, assess all available information and make recommendations to the governor.

Other than allocating state resources, what can the Colorado governor do in the event of a pandemic?

The governor has broad powers to respond in an emergency (see C.R.S. § 24-32-2104(7)). In any disaster, the governor may suspend "the orders, rules, or regulations of any state agency, if strict compliance with provisions of any statute, order, rule, or regulation would in any way prevent, hinder, or delay necessary action in coping with the emergency."

Executive orders have been drafted for the governor to use in a public health emergency. They only would be signed by the governor at the time of the emergency for them to go into effect.



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Colorado Governor's draft executive orders

- **Executive Order 0.0** - Declares a state of disaster emergency
- **Executive Order 1.0** - Orders hospitals to transfer or stop admitting patients
- **Executive Order 2.0** - Concerns the procurement and taking of certain medicines and vaccines
- **Executive Order 3.0** - Suspends certain statutes and regulations to allow rapid distribution of medicines or vaccines
- **Executive Order 4.0** - Suspends physician and nurse licensing statutes to allow out-of-state health care workers to respond to emergencies
- **Executive Order 5.0** - Suspends certain licensing statutes to enable supervised, licensed physician assistants and emergency medical technicians to assist with the emergency
- **Executive Order 6.0** - Authorizes the state to isolate or quarantine individuals
- **Executive Order 7.0** - Orders facilities to transfer or receive patients with mental illness to help respond to the emergency
- **Executive Order 8.0** - Suspends certain statutes pertaining to burial practices to allow for rapid burial of epidemic victims
- **Executive Order 9.0** - Authorizes the governor to cancel public events and close certain public buildings and schools

What is a pandemic?

You may have heard the term “epidemic,” referring to an outbreak of a contagious disease that spreads rapidly and widely. A flu “pandemic” happens when a new flu virus appears around the world. Because it is new, there is little natural immunity to the virus, and the disease can spread easily from person to person.



What is Colorado's approach to anti-viral medications such as Tamiflu?

There are more than 600,000 10-day treatments of Tamiflu, or oseltamivir, reserved for Colorado through the Strategic National Stockpile. While the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment is supporting local public health agencies that want to purchase additional antivirals at the federal contract price, the department has decided not to purchase additional courses of Tamiflu through the federal government for the following reasons:

- Any Tamiflu purchased through the federal contract must be used only to treat influenza; it cannot be used to protect the uninfected from getting influenza.
- There is little evidence regarding the effectiveness of Tamiflu in treating a novel pandemic influenza such as H5N1 avian flu.
- Any Tamiflu purchased through the federal contract that is not used by the drug's expiration date cannot be rotated and must be discarded.

Due to these limitations, Colorado will maintain a smaller quantity of Tamiflu on its own, so that there will be flexibility in having some pre-positioned antiviral medicines available. The goal is to support local decisions about the most effective use of the medicines in response to a pandemic or other influenza-related event.

How will antivirals such as Tamiflu be used in Colorado?

First, as directed by the federal government, the 600,000 10-day treatments available to the state from the Strategic National Stockpile will be used to treat the sick in the event of a pandemic. These courses cannot be used to protect others from a possibility or likelihood of contracting the virus.

Second, the Tamiflu maintained by state and local public health can be used to protect those individuals most at risk of contracting the virus. In the event of a pandemic, Colorado will use its Tamiflu to help protect individuals, such as health care workers, emergency response personnel and others, who are most directly responsible for working with the already sick and who, therefore, are most at risk of contracting and spreading the virus.

What should individuals do to prepare for an emergency like pandemic flu?

Be healthy. Be ready. Be informed. These simple statements represent three things all Coloradans should do to prepare for any emergency.

- **Be healthy** - practice basic self-care: get plenty of rest, exercise and eat a balanced diet. Cover your cough. Wash your hands. Stay home if you are sick. Avoid large crowds in the event of any disease outbreak.
- **Be ready** - prepare a home emergency kit with enough food, water, medicine and first aid supplies to last for two weeks in case you need to stay at home.
- **Be informed** - tune to radio and TV broadcasts and check the websites of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment at www.cdphe.state.co.us, READYColorado at www.readycolorado.com and the federal government's site at www.pandemicflu.gov for the latest developments.

How has Colorado used the federal funds received for emergency preparedness?

Colorado has received approximately \$11 million to fund public health emergency preparedness activities this year. The majority of that money has been distributed to local health agencies to lead and support planning at the local level. The remaining funds are being used by the state to maintain the state-level preparedness needed for any response. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment also has received almost \$15 million in federal funding to further develop pandemic plans and preparations. Of these funds, a significant percentage is allocated across the state to local public health agencies.

How many patients could be accommodated by Colorado's health care system? What is Colorado's "surge capacity" in the event of a pandemic?

Colorado has more than 25,000 hospital beds. Of those, only about 10 percent are available at any one time. In addition to the beds already in place through the state's many health care providers, Colorado has an additional 6,500 emergency medical beds in strategic locations around the state. The issue in Colorado is not available beds; rather, it will be medical personnel to staff the beds.

What is Colorado doing to help increase the number of medical staff members available?

The state has a volunteer registry with which the state can pre-qualify medically trained people who want to help during a public health emergency. The Colorado Volunteer Mobilizer is available to local public health agencies as well. Recruiting is ongoing to register more volunteers for the database. The primary purpose is to have a single database of qualified, trained medical volunteers who can be called upon in the event of medical necessity. The system also will allow non-medical volunteers to sign up for logistical or administrative support assistance.

Who decides when to close schools?

Ultimately, the Colorado's chief medical officer at the Department of Public Health and Environment is charged with offering recommendations to the governor regarding closing schools statewide. However, local public health agencies and local mayors and county commissioners have the authority to do the same in their jurisdictions.

Will Colorado have a hotline number for people to call for information?

Yes, the CoHELP line at 1-877-462-2911 has public health information every day. During a public health emergency, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment will work with CoHELP staff to provide updated information about any large-scale, health-related emergency such as pandemic flu.



Learn more about pandemic flu

www.cdphe.state.co.us/epr

www.pandemicflu.gov