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Surviving a Pandemic

Taken from various articles on the internet.
With our own input.

What if over the weekend, the government told Americans to start storing canned foods and powdered milk under their beds as the prospect of a deadly bird flu outbreak approaches the United States. The fear is that the bird flu will turn into a pandemic and drastically alter the course of American life for a time.

The Red Cross says that if there's a pandemic, we need to prepare for 10 days of being stuck in our homes, and that we may be without power and water during that time. In the event of a bird flu pandemic, Americans should plan for interruptions or delays in other services: Banks might close, hospitals could be overwhelmed, and postal service could be spotty. Experts also say that people need to begin stocking up on extra food and supplies like protective masks, flashlights, portable radios, batteries and matches.

"When you go to the store and buy three cans of tuna fish, buy a fourth and put it under the bed. When you go to the store to buy some milk, pick up a box of powdered milk, put it under the bed," said Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt. "When you do that for a period of four to six months, you are going to have a couple of weeks of food. And that's what we're talking about."

Previous pandemics occurred in 1918, 1957 and 1968, and the worst waves of illness seem to pass through communities in a matter of six weeks to eight weeks. Computer models suggest about 30 percent of people could be infected, but not all at the same time.

In the event of a pandemic, people must practice what the health officials call "social distancing," or keeping away from other people's germs. Schools and day-care centers could be closed, sporting events and other large gatherings could be canceled, and shaking hands could become socially unacceptable, at least for a while.

Darlene Washington, the director of disease prevention education at the American Red Cross, came to "Good Morning America" to go over some of the must-haves in the event of a bird flu pandemic.

*Water

"We recommend that each member of your family has a gallon of water for each day, so a family of four needs to have 40 gallons of water available and you need that much water stored because there's a chance that your water will get cut off if there's a pandemic," Washington said. "Workers may not be able to make it, and plants may stop operating. Your family will need to drink water and for hygiene, for brushing their teeth and washing their hands."

Food

"You need foods that will not spoil," Washington said. "So you need canned foods like tuna. You also need to get foods that you don't have to heat, because just like your water, your powers may go out, too. In addition, to things like canned tuna, you should start storing peanut butter, protein, bars, crackers. Again, foods that have a long shelf life and that don't need to be heated. Make sure you have enough formula and baby food to get through those 10 days. You have to plan for every member of your family and that includes your pets. So get extra dog food or cat food, and make sure you have extra water for your pets. You need a 10-day supply for everyone."

Power Outages

"Stores are going to run out of what you need, too," Washington said. "So that's why you need to stock up now. And we encourage families to have supplies on hand like flashlights and batteries, matches. Hand-cranked or battery-operated radios and a manual can opener, because you are going to need to open all those cans of food. And this may not seem important but you must get activities for your children and yourself, games, coloring books, cards."

Cleaning Supplies

"You have to have all those on hand to keep your home clean and to have receptacles for all your trash," she said. "You probably won't have trash service and you need to account for that. You need to make sure to have paper towels, toilet paper and soap. Everything you need to keep your home clean and practice good hygiene."

Medication

"You need to get an additional 10 days of all your prescription medications," Washington said. "You should also have over-the-counter, fever-reducing medications; medications for upset stomach; and cold and flu medication. You'll also want to have fluids like

Gatorade and Pedialite, which have electrolytes and will help a family member rehydrate if they get sick. Also, keep a few thermometers around in case someone gets sick."

If a Family Member Gets Sick ...

"The first thing is to strengthen your hand washing and to have the infected family member cover his mouth when he coughs," she said. "You should also keep that person isolated in a certain part of the house and identify a family member who will help him. You may have to take turns."

No one can predict whether or when a pandemic flu will actually occur. We can't even put reliable odds on it. All health officials can say with certainty is that, historically, pandemics do happen, and that conditions are now in place for another one to unfold. The gun is loaded and cocked. It might not fire this year or next, or even in the next 25 years, but everything we know says it is bound to happen sooner or later. "The general consensus among scientists who are studying this is that it is not a matter of if a pandemic will happen, but when," Stanford immunology professor Lucy Tompkins has said, echoing many other similar comments. Considering the horrific potential—tens, or even hundreds, of millions dead before effective vaccines can be manufactured and distributed—we'd have to be nuts not to get ready now.

According to Michael Osterholm, director of the Center of Infectious Disease Research and Policy:

We can predict now 12 to 18 months of stress, of watching loved ones die, of potentially not going to work, of wondering if you're going to have food on the table the next day. Those are all things that are going to mean that we're going to have to plan unlike any other kind of crisis that we've had literally in the last 80-some years in this country.

Now that you've swallowed that idea, consider the next, even weirder, level. In the most severe pandemic, social isolation could be the least of our problems. If the infection and death rate get high enough, services and supplies could become dangerously interrupted. With key people absent from filtration plants, city water systems might go in and out of reliability. Same with fire, police, and of course emergency rooms. Electrical grids could fail without sufficient expertise at key moments. Food shortages are a serious possibility if production or transportation stop. The stock market, needless to say, won't enjoy the supply shortages and dearth of shopping. It's not hard to imagine a grave pandemic sparking a worldwide depression, and even an environment of desperation and lawlessness.

Here's how to survive a severe pandemic: Prepare to become self-sufficient for several months; stockpile nonperishable food, water, disinfectants, prescription medication, office supplies, batteries and generators, air-filter masks, cash (small bills), portable gas cookware, entertainment for the kids, and so on. If you happen to be shopping for an air purifier anyway, make sure it has a UV component like these—that's the only type that will actually kill a virus. Consider having to take care of a sick family member if a

hospital is out of the question; this would require the antivirals Tamiflu or Relenza (Relenza is likely to be more effective, since Tamiflu more quickly provokes resistance), as well as drugs for nausea, fever, pain, and muscle aches; basic medical supplies like gloves, masks, and a blood pressure monitor would also be prudent. There are a number of extremely thorough preparedness guides here. More generally, you can learn everything you need to know about the causes and consequences of a pandemic here.

If you have a rural retreat, consider using it. Also, consider that in a worst-case scenario, you might have to defend the security of your well-supplied home from desperate outsiders. Finally, consider that everyone has to die sometime, and unless you have no survivors at all, it is reckless not to have your affairs in order.

Aside from whatever personal planning you're comfortable with, be sure to follow this issue closely. There's a reasonable chance that attentive readers will have a few weeks' warning before people start emptying grocery-store shelves. Look for phrases like:

" ... a quarantine has been placed around the village of _____ "

" ... emergency doses of Tamiflu have been rushed to the scene . . . "

" ... 'this could be what we've been fearing,' said one WHO official. "

If the avian flu pandemic is exactly as lethal as the 1918 pandemic (a 20 percent infection rate and a 2.5 percent mortality rate), we can expect 1.9 million deaths in the United States and 180 million to 360 million deaths globally.