



*Embassy of the United States of America
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia*

WARDEN MESSAGE

April 6, 2008

The Department of State has recently posted new instructions regarding procedures to be followed in the event of a pandemic influenza outbreak. The Embassy requests that wardens pass the following message in its entirety to members of the American Community:

Remain in Country During a Pandemic

Health professionals are concerned that the continued spread of a highly pathogenic avian influenza virus among animals (mainly poultry) in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe has the potential to significantly threaten human health. If highly pathogenic avian influenza, such as the H5N1 subtype, mutates and spreads easily from one person to another, influenza could break out globally, and lead to a pandemic. While there are no reports of *sustained* human-to-human transmission of such a virus, the U.S. Government and international health agencies are advising Americans living, working and/or traveling overseas how to prepare for a pandemic, should one strike.

Private American citizens should be aware that it may not be possible to travel during an outbreak. Governments may close borders suddenly and without advance warning; commercial air, land and sea carriers could curtail or cancel service; and restricting travel may be the best way to reduce the risk of exposure to the virus. These developments could impede a return to the United States or travel to another country or region. Therefore, Americans who are overseas during a pandemic may need to remain where they are until conditions improve, a situation which could last several months.

Private American Citizens Living and/or Working Overseas: Consider local conditions and evaluate your ability to maintain adequate supplies of food, water, and medication should a pandemic result in borders closing or disruptions in international travel. Decide on your optimal location in a pandemic and plan accordingly. Ask your doctor in advance about obtaining appropriate medication for treatment if you become ill, keeping in mind it could take many months to develop and produce sufficient quantities of a vaccine during a pandemic. Remember that U.S. embassies, consulates and military facilities lack the legal authority, capability, and resources to dispense medications, vaccines or medical care to private American citizens overseas. If you are a private American citizen (e.g. living, working, touring, studying overseas) you will need to rely on local health care providers and locally-available medications since U.S. government facilities will not be able to provide medications or treat you.

Short-Term Visitors, Tourists, and Students Abroad: Consult with your doctor before you travel and ask about medications you should take with you. Research the availability and quality of medical facilities at your destination. Be aware that hotels may cease to provide housekeeping and food services during a pandemic. Consider changing your travel plans or returning to the U.S. once there is evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission, since commercial air transport may become unavailable at an early point.

Plan to Remain in Country: If the WHO declares a pandemic, Americans who are overseas should be prepared to remain in country for an extended period. You should avoid non-essential

travel beyond your home and workplace and you should limit activities that could expose you to others who may be ill. Based on varying conditions abroad, Americans should prepare contingency plans and emergency supplies (non-perishable food, potable water or water-purification supplies, medication, etc.) for the possibility of remaining in country for at least two and up to twelve weeks. Visit www.pandemicflu.gov to see examples of comprehensive planning checklists for individuals, businesses, schools, and other groups.

What Can You Do? You should **wash** your hands regularly with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds to eradicate viruses and bacteria. When soap and water are not available, apply a hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60 percent alcohol content. Cover your coughs and sneezes. Get vaccinated against seasonal flu. Ask your employer, organization or school about pandemic contingency plans. And please review detailed community mitigation guidelines as well as information on the use of masks and anti-viral medications in a pandemic, also available on www.pandemicflu.gov.

What About During a Pandemic? During a pandemic, people should practice social distancing measures such as teleworking, limiting face-to-face meetings, avoiding crowds, and maintaining a distance of six (6) feet or more from other people. Healthy employees should consult with their employer about reporting to work during a pandemic, taking into account local conditions and the risk of infection. Sick people, or those who reside with a sick person, should consult with their healthcare provider to determine the appropriate course of action which could include home treatment.

Keep Informed: American citizens living in or traveling to countries with human or animal cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza should consider the potential risks and plan accordingly. Keep current with the latest medical guidance and practical information. Visit www.travel.state.gov to review the Country-Specific Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Alerts for up-to-date assessments of conditions in specific countries and to obtain additional information on pandemic influenza.

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American citizens are reminded to keep their registration up-to-date. See <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/> for registration information.

You can also review earlier Warden Messages at <http://riyadh.usembassy.gov/service/advisories-for-americans-in-ksa/warden-messages.html>.

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