As you know, health experts are warning about a global pandemic flu that could kill and hospitalize millions of people in the United States, and have a recession-like effect on the U.S. economy in the year following the outbreak.

You and your office staff, including nurses and colleagues, may be affected by the pandemic and unable to work at a time when there may be an increased number of office visits, calls and patient activity. Are you prepared?

Caremark has been asked by many to provide information and resources to help with pandemic readiness planning.

Although there is no way to predict when a pandemic might occur or the severity of its impact, we understand that individuals will come to you with questions. That is why we have provided this overview for your use. More information, including a description of the Caremark Pandemic Flu Pharmacy Service, and printable health guidelines are available on www.caremark.com. Other important resources include links to the CDC, WHO and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

PANDEMIC FLU STATUS.
The highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI H5N1) virus has the potential to become a pandemic. According to the World Health Organization, more than half of people infected with the HPAI H5N1 virus have died.

Since bird influenza viruses rarely infect people, humans may have little or no immunity to HPAI H5N1, and it is unknown what percent of people will die after it mutates into a form that easily infects humans.

If the HPAI H5N1 virus does mutate into a form that is easily transmitted from person to person, it could trigger a global pandemic.

A PANDEMIC CAN START WHEN THREE CONDITIONS HAVE BEEN MET:

- A new influenza virus subtype emerges;
- The flu infects humans, causing serious illness;
- It spreads easily and sustainably among humans.

The H5N1 virus meets the first two conditions. As long as the virus continues to circulate in birds, there is an opportunity for it to establish sustained and efficient human transmission.
SYMPTOMS OF AVIAN INFLUENZA IN HUMANS

The reported symptoms of avian influenza in humans have ranged from typical influenza-like symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches) to eye infections (conjunctivitis), pneumonia, acute respiratory distress, viral pneumonia, and other severe and life-threatening complications.¹

TREATMENT OPTIONS.

The first avian flu vaccine was recently approved by the FDA and has limited efficacy against certain strains of HPAI H5N1. It will not be commercially available, since all of the vaccine is being purchased by the U.S. government as part of the National Strategic Stockpile. Vaccines used for seasonal influenza are not expected to be effective against pandemic flu. Other more effective pre-pandemic flu vaccines are currently in clinical trials. These may provide some degree of protection from infection with a pandemic strain.

Some companies, especially those in critical infrastructure industries, have proactively included antiviral medications as part of their pandemic planning process. The World Health Organization recently issued guidelines on pharmacological management of patients infected with avian influenza A (H5N1), including the appropriate use of the neuraminidase inhibitors Tamiflu® and Relenza®.

This information⁶ can be accessed at:

The FDA has approved Tamiflu (oseltamivir) for treatment of influenza in persons age one year and older and for prophylaxis of influenza in persons one year of age and older. Relenza (zanamivir) is approved for treatment of influenza in persons seven years of age and older.⁷

GOOD HEALTH HABITS ARE CRITICAL.

Staying healthy is, of course, the best protection. Here are a few general health tips to keep in mind:

- Avoid close contact
- Stay home when sick
- Cover mouth and nose
- Clean/wash hands
- Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth
- Get a yearly flu vaccination (flu shot)

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have specific information, guidelines and checklists for physicians regarding the education and the treatment of patients. To access them, visit www.Pandemicflu.gov. The American Academy of Family Physicians also offers comprehensive information at their Web-site, www.aafp.org.


The Caremark Pandemic Flu Pharmacy Services program is a pharmacy services offering by Caremark Inc. It is intended to assist Caremark's customers with their efforts to plan and prepare for a possible pandemic event. The information on the possibility of a pandemic is presented as background information only. Caremark is not an authority on appropriate or required response measures to be taken in advance of the potential pandemic that Avian Flu represents. Further, the timing and pattern of a pandemic is unpredictable.

According to the manufacturer of Tamiflu®, Roche Laboratories Inc., Tamiflu is indicated for the treatment of influenza in patients one year of age and older who have had symptoms for no more than 2 days. Tamiflu is also indicated for the prevention of influenza in patients aged one year and older. The manufacturer also advises that there is no evidence of efficacy of Tamiflu in any illness caused by agents other than influenza viruses Types A and B. Further, the efficacy of Tamiflu in patients who begin treatment after 40 hours of symptoms has not been established (www.tamiflu.com).