

Supervisor's Column  
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### **Preparing for Pandemic Flu**

In the past few months, the national news has warned of the widespread dangers unleashed by pandemic flu, such as avian or bird flu. The Town of Brighton is working with Monroe County to develop and refine a plan of action in response to a possible outbreak. In this initiative, as always, our first priority is protecting the health and safety of our residents.

Monroe County has identified and defined several "points of distribution," or PODs, where medication can be quickly and efficiently dispensed, if quick inoculation becomes necessary. In the County, Brighton is a POD; within Brighton, there are two PODs: Brighton High School and Monroe Community College.

The "flu" that sends us to bed for a week is an infection of the respiratory tract caused by the highly contagious influenza virus, which rapidly spreads in seasonal epidemics (from late fall to early spring). Thanks to the flu vaccine – available in shot or nasal-spray form – many Americans are protected to some extent from this illness. However, genetic mutations in the virus have resulted in three influenza pandemics in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, in which stronger and more brutal strains spread rapidly and endanger health to the point of threatening lives.

Avian flu, or bird flu, is caused by influenza viruses that occur naturally among birds in the wild. One strain is mild; the other is more severe, killing domestic fowl, and runs the risk of being transmitted from birds to humans. Public health officials point to

bird flu as an incipient danger, fearing that the virus will mutate and set off the next human pandemic. As a proactive measure, they are urging governments at all levels to prepare and plan for strategies that reduce the impact of a pandemic, until a vaccine becomes available.

The Monroe County Department of Health is working closely with local, state and federal health officials to develop a “community plan” to address this serious threat and prepare for immediate action. The Town of Brighton is doing its part to assemble the necessary resources and engineer a coordinated response of health care, communication and social support.

On Tuesday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, the Monroe County Public Health Emergency Management Office will conduct a large-scale Point of Dispensing (POD) drill at the Dome Center from 8:30 am to 2:30 pm, to simulate our public health response procedure in the event of a pandemic influenza outbreak, after which the practice will be evaluated to determine what improvements should be made. Volunteers for the drill are needed for one-hour intervals throughout the day. For more information, contact 753-5446.

The magnitude of a potential pandemic outbreak may require you and your family to remain at home and limit your outings for several weeks, to reduce the chances of contracting, spreading or aggravating the virus. Here are steps you can take now, in the spirit of being prepared:

- Stay up-to-date on all of your immunizations, especially flu and pneumonia shots.
- Talk with your doctor about getting an extra supply of your regular prescription drugs.

- Stock up on food, water and health supplies such as pain relievers, cough and cold medicines.
- Plan home learning exercises and recreational activities that your children can do at home.

With the help of drills such as PODEX, thorough preparation, informed residents, and coordinated action, we can better prepare ourselves to limit the damage posed by a pandemic flu outbreak. In the meantime, here's to a happy, healthy Spring!