

Health Care in a Pandemic – Prepare for Change

On a typical day, emergency rooms in King County are busy with a steady stream of illnesses and injuries. Now imagine what our ERs would look like during a severe influenza pandemic when hundreds of additional patients are added each day—and with a third of the hospital staff out with the flu. It’s the kind of scenario that may face all hospitals, clinics, and doctors’ offices during a severe flu pandemic.

The strain on the healthcare system during a severe flu pandemic will be unlike any other disaster, so we all need to be prepared for possible changes. Even though healthcare facilities in King County are working to increase their ability to care for a surge in pandemic flu patients, it may be difficult to get medical care or talk to your healthcare provider. There may not be enough medical supplies, healthcare providers, and hospital beds for all persons who are ill. As a result, healthcare providers will need to make tough decisions about who receives medical care and how much treatment can be administered.

Vacant hospital beds may be scarce, but most people who get a pandemic flu virus can be cared for at home and will recover. During a pandemic, updated information and advice about home medical care will be available on the Public Health – Seattle & King County website and through a telephone hotline. Know how to get information from your healthcare provider and public health officials during an emergency, including about how to obtain medical care. Health care information and hotline numbers will be broadcast over local news media and on the Public Health-Seattle & King County website,

www.metrokc.gov/health/pandemicflu

A severe pandemic will place tremendous stress on everyone, including healthcare providers. But in most cases, people with the flu can receive the care they need at home, and basic precautions and attention will really help.

