



MIZZOU

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Around the Columns

Prepare, don't panic

Media chatter about bird flu has slowed, but it's still a legitimate global threat. While the 1918 influenza pandemic had a mortality rate of 5 percent, the few cases of bird flu in humans worldwide have had 50 percent mortality rates. Already, the virus has spread in birds from Southeast Asia to Russia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa.

Michael Cooperstock

Mizzou's own immunology expert, Dr. Michael Cooperstock, answers questions about pandemic flu [online](#). Photo by Nicholas Benner.

The good news is that the virus very rarely infects humans with close bird contact. It only rarely spreads from person to person. It is possible that the virus may never mutate into a pandemic-causing form. But MU is still preparing for the worst.

Campus emergency procedures can be found [online](#). In addition, the University is working closely with county and city officials to coordinate a more detailed campus plan for pandemic flu.




Committees working on preparedness grapple with questions such as: "When should classes be canceled and what should students do?" "How do we keep research going to avoid losing decades of hard work?" And, "What if employees are afraid to come to work?"

Communication is key. [MU Alert](#) is the best source of information about any campus emergency for students, parents and other concerned individuals.

MU has also established a [Web site](#) to educate the public about all things flu-related. The site features Mizzou's own expert, Dr. Michael Cooperstock, professor and chief of the Division of Pediatric Infectious Disease and Rheumatology at University Hospital.

Despite worst-case scenario planning, Cooperstock advises against panic. "One perfectly reasonable scenario is that it could all die out and go away," Cooperstock says, citing SARS and the recent Iowa mumps scare as examples of potential pandemics that petered out. "The thing to do now is to learn about the disease."

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Published by MIZZOU magazine, 109 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, MO 65211 | Phone: 573-882-5916
| E-mail: Mizzou@missouri.edu

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