

# Life, Work & Family

Monthly work/life news for UAW-Represented DaimlerChrysler Workers

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Brought to you by the Circle of Life Committee 1-800-809-4996

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## Avian or "Bird" Flu

You've probably been hearing a lot about Avian or "Bird" Flu in the news and casual conversation. What's the real risk? What sort of precautionary steps can you take? There's a overwhelming amount of information circulating on this topic and most of it is duplicative.

### What is pandemic influenza?

A pandemic is a widespread outbreak of disease. More specifically, it is an outbreak of disease that affects a large number of people and occurs over a wide geographic area. Influenza pandemics occur when a new strain of the influenza virus emerges that humans have little or no exposure or immunity to. Influenza pandemics are regularly occurring events and happen approximately three or four times every hundred years.

### Why is pandemic influenza in the news?

An influenza virus, named H5N1, that occurs among birds (therefore the names 'avian flu' or 'bird flu') was first identified in humans in Hong Kong in 1997. To date, H5N1 has infected mainly bird populations, but in numerous instances, humans have been infected. Alarmingly, this new virus has resulted in high rates of sickness among affected bird populations as well as high fatality rates among human cases. According to the World Health Organization in November 2005 there have been 133 confirmed cases in humans. Of these 133 bases, 68 of the infected individuals died (51 percent).

At this point in time, the H5N1 influenza virus does not seem to be passed easily from human to human. Scientists fear that if the virus adapts to make human-to-human transmissions easier, pandemic influenza could result.

### What are the possible treatment options for 'bird flu'?

There are two main medical options for battling pandemic influenza: vaccination and antiviral medications. Vaccination may be helpful to prevent the spread of influenza and is used regularly to manage the spread of seasonal influenza. However, a vaccine for H5N1 is not yet available. The United States has recently announced that it will be stockpiling millions of doses of an experimental vaccine, but its effectiveness is not yet known.

While researchers are working on the development of an effective vaccine, it is possible that a vaccine may not be available until months after the beginning of an outbreak. Research is underway to both improve the currently available vaccine as well as improve techniques that will enable quick creation and production of a new vaccine in the case of an emerging pandemic.

Antiviral medications - substances that prevent illness or minimize the impact of the illness - may be effective in combating pandemic influenza. Specifically, Tamiflu and Relenza have shown in laboratory studies to reduce the severity and duration of symptoms for the regular seasonal influenza. The United States has plans for stockpiling antiviral medications for the possible outbreak of pandemic influenza (<http://www.pandemicflu.gov>).

### **What can I do as an individual?**

There are a number of things individuals can do to minimize transmission of influenza and prepare for a possible pandemic.

Individuals can minimize transmission of influenza in multiple ways. The first is to receive, if eligible, vaccination for the seasonal flu. Receiving a vaccination for the seasonal flu will not protect against bird flu. However, many people are more susceptible to other illnesses while recovering from the seasonal flu. Avoiding it and keeping your immune system healthy and strong is a worthy protective measure.

Second, there are a number of hygiene-based approaches that may minimize transmission. Influenza viruses are mainly transmitted from person to person through coughing or breathing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends these five actions: 1) avoid close contact with people who are sick; 2) stay home when you are sick; 3) cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing; 4) wash your hands; and 5) avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

There are a number of actions that individuals can undertake to improve their and their families' preparedness. Make sure that important legal paperwork, such as wills and insurance policies, are current. Individuals should work with their employers to understand sick leave policies and health insurance benefits (if applicable). Families can begin discussing and formulating emergency communication and caretaking plans. For example, if there are school-age children in a family, what will happen if schools are closed for an extended period of time? Alternatively in families with isolated or elderly family members, is there a caretaking plan for these individuals?

Finally, emergency management experts recommend the creation of 'emergency kits.' These are stockpiles of essential items including food, water, and regularly used over-the-counter and prescription medications. If you have pets, you will want to consider them in these preparations as well.

*Written for WPO by Jenifer Allsworth, PhD, Epidemiologist.*

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## **Travel Tips for Students**



Although most trips abroad are trouble free, being prepared will go a long way to avoiding the possibility of serious trouble.

Become familiar with the basic laws and customs of the country you plan to visit before you travel.

Remember: Reckless behavior while in another country can do more than ruin your vacation; it can land you in a foreign jail or worse! To have a safe trip, avoid risky behavior and plan ahead.

### **Preparing for Your Trip Abroad**

- Apply early for your passport and, if necessary, any visas. Passports are required to enter and/or depart most countries around the world. Apply for a passport as soon as possible. Some countries also require U.S. citizens to obtain visas before entering. Most countries require visitors who are planning to study or work abroad to obtain visas before entering. Check with the embassy of the

foreign country that you are planning to visit for up-to-date visa and other entry requirements. (Passport and visa information is available on the Internet at <http://travel.state.gov>.)

- Learn about the countries that you plan to visit. Before departing, take the time to do some research about the people and their culture, and any problems that the country is experiencing that may affect your travel plans. The Department of State publishes Background Notes on about 170 countries. These brief, factual pamphlets contain information on each country's culture, history, geography, economy, government, and current political situation. Background Notes are available at [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov).
- Read the consular information sheet. Consular Information Sheets provide up-to-date travel information on any country in the world that you plan to visit. They cover topics such as entry regulations, the crime and security situation, drug penalties, road conditions, and the location of the U.S. embassy, consulates, and consular agencies.
- Check for travel warnings and public announcements. Travel Warnings recommend U.S. citizens defer travel to a country because of dangerous conditions. Public Announcements provide fast-breaking information about relatively short-term conditions that may pose risks to the security of travelers.
- Find out the location of the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. If you are traveling to a remote area or one that is experiencing civil unrest, find out the location of the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate and register with the Consular Section when you arrive. (U.S. embassy and consulate locations can be found in the country's Consular Information Sheet.) If your family needs to reach you because of an emergency, they can pass a message to you through the Office of Overseas Citizens Services at 202-647-5225. This office will contact the embassy or consulate in the country where you are traveling and pass a message from your family to you. Remember consular officers cannot cash checks, lend money or serve as your attorney. They can, however, if the need arises, assist you in obtaining emergency funds from your family, help you find an attorney, help you find medical assistance, and replace your lost or stolen passport.
- Find out what information your school offers. Find out whether your school offers additional information for students who are planning to study, travel, or work abroad. Many student advisors can provide you with information about studying or working abroad. They may also be able to provide you with information on any travel benefits for students (e.g. how to save money on transportation and accommodations, and other resources.)
- Before committing yourself or your finances, find out about the organization and what it offers. The majority of private programs for vacation, study or work abroad are reputable and financially sound. However, some charge exorbitant fees, use deliberately false "educational" claims, and provide working conditions far different from those advertised. Even programs of legitimate organizations can be poorly administered.

### **How to Access Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings, and Public Announcements**

There are four ways to obtain Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings, and Public Announcements:

- **Internet:** <http://travel.state.gov>
- **Telephone:** Dial the Office of Overseas Citizens Services at 202-647-5225.
- **Mail:** Send a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope to: Overseas Citizens Services, Room 4811, Department of State, Washington, DC 20520-4818. On the outside envelope, write the name of the country or countries needed in the lower left corner.
- Also available at <http://travel.state.gov>: passport applications and procedures, foreign and U.S. visa information, travel publications (including the pamphlet Travel Warning on Drugs Abroad), links to several U.S. embassy and consulate web sites worldwide, and other sources of information for students.

### **Top Ten Travel Tips for Students**

1. Make sure you have a signed, valid passport and visas, if required. Also, before you go, fill in the emergency information page of your passport!
2. Read the Consular Information Sheets (and Public Announcements or Travel Warnings, if applicable) for the countries you plan to visit.

3. Leave copies of your itinerary, passport data page and visas with family or friends at home, so that you can be contacted in case of an emergency. Keep your host program informed of your whereabouts.
4. Make sure you have insurance that will cover your emergency medical needs (including medical evacuation) while you are overseas.
5. Familiarize yourself with local laws and customs of the countries to which you are traveling. Remember, while in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws!
6. Do not leave your luggage unattended in public areas and never accept packages from strangers.
7. While abroad, avoid using illicit drugs or drinking excessive amounts of alcoholic beverages, and associating with people who do.
8. Do not become a target for thieves by wearing conspicuous clothing and expensive jewelry and do not carry excessive amounts of cash or unnecessary credit cards.
9. Deal only with authorized agents when you exchange money to avoid violating local laws.
10. When overseas, avoid demonstrations and other situations that may become unruly or where anti-American sentiments may be expressed.

*Source: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2000*

## Common Home Problems: High Energy Bills

### Diagnosis:

One reason for high energy bills is an increase in the price of electricity or heating fuel. However, it is common to trace high energy bills to an in-efficient component (windows, heating and cooling equipment, ducts insulation) of your home or a failure of one of these components to perform as intended. It is not always easy to pin-point the problem, but fixing it can make your home more energy-efficient and comfortable.

### Prescription Checklist:

To improve the energy efficiency of your home start with an evaluation of your homes energy use.

- To get started **today** use our Home Improvement Tools to score your home's energy use and generate a customized list of improvement. You will need one year of your utility bills handy.
- For **best results** hire a contractor who is an energy specialist to do an in-home evaluation. A good specialist will use diagnostic equipment to evaluate the performance of your home and generate a customized list of improvements. To help you find a contractor please refer to our recommendations. The recommendations include a list of organizations that can help you find the right contractor.
- Improvements may include sealing air leaks, adding insulation (Home Sealing) or sealing duct air leaks. Some of these you can do yourself, but you may prefer to hire a contractor.
- Turn down the temperature on your water heater to 120 degrees F.
- Replace the light bulbs in your highest usage lights with ENERGY STAR CFL bulbs.
- When replacing lighting or appliances look for ENERGY STAR qualified light fixtures and appliances
- Install an ENERGY STAR qualified programmable thermostat, and use it to save energy while you are away at work.
- Contact your utility and ask if they offer any programs to help lower energy bills.



*Source: Energy Star*

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## What's New – The Homework Helpline

This month the UAW-DaimlerChrysler Family Resource & Referral Program would like to introduce our newest service: **The Homework Helpline!**

The Homework Helpline is a **FREE** benefit that is available to you and your children. This program assists your children with their homework. It's simple to use too! You or your child can be connected to a live teacher in the academic area needed, by simply calling the 1-800 number below.

This service is available to all UAW represented DaimlerChrysler employees and their families. You can access the program Monday – Friday from 4pm to 9pm. Just let the consultant know which topic you need help with, along with your plant name.

# UAW-DaimlerChrysler Family Resource & Referral Program Homework Helpline 1-877-500-2345



**Need some help navigating around life's little (and not so little) challenges?**

Contact your Family Resource & Referral Program at **1-800-809-4996** and speak with a Care Consultant to receive information to help you balance your work and life issues.