

Pandemic-flu education goes mobile

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University of Illinois researchers have developed the first interactive tool to educate the public about pandemic flu via the mobile phone.

Mobile PanFlu Prep is a free, interactive program that will be launched to the public March 1. Researchers hope it will be a public service.

"It seems so logical, but this is the first time that cell phones have been used to communicate valuable public health information for disaster preparedness," said Colleen Monahan, director of the Center for the Advancement of Distance Education at the UIC School of Public Health. "This is a first-aid kit for the future."

Monahan is considered the driving force behind the idea.

The downloadable program offers a variety of menu items and audio sections providing advice on avoiding the flu, including a preparation checklist that gives specific information on stockpiling supplies such as water, non-perishable food, first-aid kits and face masks.

The program is available in English and Spanish.

Initial rollout of the program will be available at no cost on Sprint, Cingular and T-mobile networks and is also available online at www.publichealthgames.com.

The program comes as fears of pandemic flu continue to linger due to an increasing number of viral outbreaks.

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