

## Prepare Now for a Coming Avian Influenza Pandemic

Ken McGee

Expert opinion holds that an avian influenza pandemic is highly likely. Enterprises must use 2006 to prepare for the potentially devastating effects of such an outbreak.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

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### Event

On 8 December 2005, the U.S. Congressional Budget Office (CBO) issued a report projecting the likely effect that a pandemic of the avian influenza virus H5N1 would have on the U.S. economy. The report considered two possible scenarios:

- **The "mild" scenario:** Under this scenario, the CBO projects 75 million cases of H5N1 infection in the United States, with 100,000 deaths, and a 1.5 percent drop in gross domestic product (GDP) — but no economic recession.
- **The "severe" scenario:** Under this scenario, the CBO projects 90 million cases of infection, with 2 million deaths and a 5 percent drop in GDP, leading to recession.

### Analysis

Since the first case of H5N1 infection in a human was identified in 1997, health officials worldwide have been extremely concerned about the possibility of a deadly avian flu pandemic. Today, two of the three conditions required for a pandemic (little or no human immunity to the H5N1 virus, and the virus's ability to replicate in humans and cause serious illness) are already in place. Moreover, recent statements by the World Health Organization make it clear that the arrival of the third requirement (the ability of the virus to be transmitted directly from human to human) is almost certain.

Enterprises should take the widespread agreement on the strong likelihood of a pandemic — and the CBO projections of the devastating economic consequences of such a pandemic — as a signal to take immediate action.

### Recommendation for IT Managers

During 1Q06, integrate your activities with any official assigned to coordinate your company's avian influenza response. If no official has been assigned that role yet, don't wait to react. By mid-2006, have in place completed pandemic/IT response plans that will, at a minimum:

- Enable large numbers of knowledge workers to perform their duties from home for an extended period of time
- Provide the means for workers to collaborate remotely
- Ensure that consistent communication with suppliers, partners, customers and other stakeholders can be maintained
- Offer backup means of communication in the event that conventional wireline, wireless, DSL (digital subscriber line), cable or other home-based communications technologies are overburdened by unanticipated traffic loads

**Note:** In the coming weeks, Gartner will publish a number of research notes and special reports to help clients devise highly effective action plans in advance of and following the outbreak of an avian influenza pandemic.

**Analytical Source:** Ken McGee, Gartner Research

### Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Key Steps to Prepare for a Possible Avian Influenza Pandemic" — Gartner offers real-world advice for enterprises preparing for a coming pandemic. **By Steve Bittinger and Dion Wiggins**
- "The Worldwide SARS Epidemic: Lessons Learned" — Enterprises can gain valuable experience in business continuity and disaster recovery from the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic. **By Dion Wiggins and Bob Hayward**

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