



# PANDEMIC FLU

PUBLIC INFORMATION SERIES

## Preparing for a Swine Flu (H1N1) Pandemic Coping and Emotional Well-Being

*What is a pandemic? Who is at risk? What will happen? Are my children safe?* As these questions occur to you, it may be helpful to learn what to expect, how to prepare and where to find needed information and support. This may increase your resilience, decrease your stress and minimize the impact on you and your loved ones during these difficult times.

### What to Prepare For

The swine flu (H1N1) outbreak has gained prominence since it began in April 2009. A flu pandemic is a global outbreak of disease that occurs when a new influenza virus appears to which people have little or no immunity. It affects people of all ages, backgrounds and locations, and could cause high numbers of illness and death as well as social disruption. During a flu pandemic—

- Many people are likely to become ill at the same time. The severity of the disease and the number of deaths caused by a pandemic virus vary greatly and can change over time.
- People who are infected with swine flu may be isolated, which means that they are separated from healthy people to reduce the chances of spreading the flu.
- People who have been exposed to the flu virus may be quarantined. This means those who have been exposed to the flu virus are physically separated from those who have not been exposed.
- A practice called “social distancing” may be in effect to limit face-to-face interaction in order to prevent exposure and transmission of the flu virus. Many things may be shut down or be canceled, including public transportation, gathering places, events, schools and businesses.
- Community services and utilities may be disrupted.
- Health care services could become overwhelmed.

These circumstances could significantly affect you. You may need to reorganize your life to care for loved ones or to receive care. You may lose income if your workplace closes or you become ill. School closures can result in the need for home-schooling or other activities for homebound children. Access to food and other household goods may become limited. The many changes in day-to-day living can cause anxiety and stress.

### Coping with Stress and Anxiety

Some ways that you can cope with stress and anxiety are—

- Get accurate information from reliable sources.
- Educate yourself about the flu pandemic.
- Maintain your normal daily routine, if you can.
- Exercise, eat well and rest.
- Stay active—physically and mentally.
- Stay in touch with family and friends.
- Spend more time with your children. Talk with them (as is age appropriate) about swine flu.
- Maintain a hopeful outlook—be prepared for things to get worse, but remember that governments and experts around the world are working hard to make things better.
- Find comfort in your spiritual and personal beliefs.
- Keep a sense of humor.

### Coping Through Preparedness

Being adequately prepared will significantly affect how you cope with stress and anxiety during a flu pandemic. It will help you feel more in control and lower your stress. Your children will also feel more secure and less anxious. Consider adopting the following preparedness strategies:

- Reduce the likelihood of infection by using good personal hygiene and self-care practices.
  - Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizer.
  - Cough or sneeze into a tissue and place used tissues directly into the trash.
  - If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow or upper sleeve.
  - After coughing or sneezing, clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
  - Stay at home if you are ill.
  - Talk with your family and friends and make a plan for taking care of one another should any of you become ill.

- Keep at least a two-week supply of non-perishable easy-to-prepare food, water and other critical household and hygiene goods.
- Keep medical supplies, prescription and non-prescription drugs on hand.
- Investigate how your health insurance carrier plans to handle costs of treatment during a pandemic.
- Check with your employer regarding policies for dealing with a pandemic.
- Ask about plans at your child’s school or day-care for dealing with a pandemic, and develop plans now for how you would keep homebound children occupied.

**Increase Your Psychological Resilience**

Psychological resilience is your ability to “bounce back” from difficult events. Certain strategies can increase your resilience and bring about new emotional strengths. The following tips can help you deal with life’s difficulties, including a pandemic.

*Identify how you cope with a crisis*

Identify your coping strengths. What other crises have occurred in your life? How did they affect you? How did you cope? Did your coping style work? Are there other ways you might cope?

*Foster healthy attitudes and beliefs*

Crises and difficult circumstances are stressful but can be overcome. Focus on finding solutions and ways to improve your situation.

*Choose nurturing and healthy behaviors*

Identify your goals and move toward them, even though progress may seem slow at times. Take decisive action in protecting and preparing yourself and your loved ones, rather than letting the pandemic situation make your choices for you.

**Professional Help**

Seek professional mental health care for yourself or your loved ones if you or they experience—

- Loss of sleep, frequent nightmares or disruptive and intrusive thoughts.
- Feelings of depression or feelings that lead to an inability to engage in usual activities.
- Disorientation, extreme memory difficulties or losing awareness of time, date and place.
- Hallucinations or delusions, such as hearing or seeing things that are not here, extremely unrealistic thinking or excessive preoccupation with an idea or thought.
- A previously identified mental health condition recurs or becomes worse.

If these circumstances occur, contact your personal physician or mental health provider. If you are currently working with a mental health provider, ask how services will be provided during a pandemic, and consider or discuss how you might get needed support or assistance from family and friends. You can also seek local mental health resources by contacting the U.S. National Mental Health Information Center at [www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/databases/](http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/databases/) or **1-800-789-2647**.

**Stay Informed**


- The situation with swine flu can change daily. Gather information on a regular basis from reliable sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and your local or state health department. You can visit the CDC Web site at [www.CDC.gov/swineflu/](http://www.CDC.gov/swineflu/) for more information.
- Stay informed, but do not constantly watch broadcast news or continually check online news sources. Excessive attention to news coverage can be unnecessarily stressful, especially for children.
- Seek information on public services that may close, so that you can plan ahead.

**You can find additional information on planning and preparing for pandemic flu at [www.RedCross.org](http://www.RedCross.org) and [www.pandemicflu.gov/](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/).**

*Stay connected*

Stay in touch with others by telephone, e-mail and other means should you be unable to get around due to movement restriction measures.

**Emergency Contact Card**



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Important Phone Numbers**

Local Health Department: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Local Red Cross Chapter: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Family Health Provider: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Mental Health Provider: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

During a pandemic or other disaster, you can let others know of your well-being by registering on the Safe and Well Web site at <https://disastersafe.redcross.org/>.