

Coping Facts for

H1N1 Flu Virus: A Stress Management Guide

As our nation prepares for the H1N1 flu outbreak, it is natural to experience some anxiety about what might happen. This guide was prepared to provide information and to help us to be prepared for our emotional response to the flu.

What Can We Learn to Help Us Cope?

- Understanding what the flu symptoms are and knowing how the flu is spread can help us to lower our possible risk factors and will assist us to monitor ourselves and our families during an outbreak in our community. Good sources for information include: www.michigan.gov/flu and www.cdc.gov/flu .
- Educating ourselves about the impact the flu may have on our lives should include considerations regarding our home, school, work, and the economy. This information will help us to manage the stress to ourselves and our families.
- Having a personal understanding of the plans that exist for schools, workplaces, and the community will also help us to prepare for changes that we may need to make in our daily lives that impact our personal routines and activities.
- Personal plans should identify the balance between the need for having enough information to prepare and protect ourselves with our risk of feeling more anxiety due to excessive media coverage.

What Can We Do To Help Protect Ourselves Emotionally?

- We can become more informed about the flu situation and offer our support to those working to provide healthcare and public safety.
- When we experience fear as a natural human emotion we can focus this fear by letting it encourage us to take helpful action by making a personal safety plan that will help us be safer and will help to encourage others to be safer.
- Simple activities that help us to lower our stress level will also help reduce our emotional response to a flu situation. Everyone may have different relaxation and coping strategies but some helpful options include walking or exercise, meditation, breathing or relaxation techniques, reading, or writing feelings down in a journal.

Even with all of our efforts to protect ourselves and our loved ones, some of us may get sick. We may feel burdened with guilt and feelings of blame. If this should occur it will be helpful to remember that we cannot control everything and that it will not be helpful to place an added emotional burden on ourselves or others.

- Preparedness can help us to reduce our risks and to deal more effectively with our fears.
- Following good health practices for ourselves and our children will increase our physical safety.
- Providing emotional support to each other by planning, practice and knowing resources will encourage our effective response to a flu outbreak.

REMEMBER: STRONG EMOTIONS ARE A NORMAL REACTION TO AN UNUSUAL EVENT LIKE A FLU OUTBREAK. We need to remind ourselves that what we are feeling is normal. For adults and children the following reactions are not unusual:

EMOTIONAL	SHOCK, SADNESS, ANGER, GUILT, HELPLESSNESS, DESPAIR
COGNITIVE	CONFUSION, MEMORY LOSS, BLAMING, POOR CONCENTRATION
BEHAVIORAL	ISOLATION, CHANGE IN SLEEPING PATTERNS AND EATING HABITS
PHYSICAL	FATIGUE, HEADACHES, HAIR LOSS, INCREASED HEARTBEAT, STOMACHACHES
SPIRITUAL	A RANGE OF RESPONSES MAY OCCUR INCLUDING BECOMING MORE SPIRITUAL WITHDRAWN OR ANGRY.

How Does Planning Help Us Deal With Our Emotions?

TAKING ACTION

- Learn what you can do in advance. Create a plan and then lead your lives with protective steps built into your normal routine.
- Identify local sources of trusted information and follow their guidance.
- Strengthen coping skills for yourself and your families by learning to identify your emotions and responding to those feelings in positive ways.
- Know that our daily lives may be significantly different during a H1N1 flu outbreak but when we take positive action we help protect ourselves and others.
- Stay involved in faith-based and other community organizations to help them to identify ways that they can maintain effective communication, stay firm in their commitment and continue to provide needed support to your community.
- Help your neighbors or family members with special needs become aware of how to prepare for the flu. Encourage your family member or friend living in a care facility to learn about their center's flu plan. Encourage them to make their own plan to keep themselves safer by taking positive action.
- Seek support from family, friends and colleagues and make use of offered community services.
- Continue your daily schedule of activities at work and leisure unless advised differently by the Health authorities.
- Seek professional mental health assistance if things feel like they are falling apart emotionally, you feel depressed, or if you have feelings of hopelessness or extreme anger.
- You may have a need for mental health services if there is not a medical explanation for chronic physical problems that you may have.

For more information, contact the Michigan Department of Community Health Office of Public Health Preparedness 201 Townsend Street Lansing, MI 48913 www.michigan.gov/flu

