H1N1 Flu Virus

CARING FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR CO-WORKERS

The news about the H1N1 Flu Virus (also known as Swine Flu) outbreak can be confusing. Reports focusing on the most sensational aspects of the flu can escalate people's anxiety and it can be hard to separate the facts from the hype. The good news is that the skills of resilience—the process of adapting well in difficult times, trauma, tragedy, threats or other major sources of stress—can help offset the anxiety that these outbreaks evoke.

Tips for Resilience During Flu Outbreaks

- *Make Connections* – Keep in touch with family, friends and others. Even if your connections can't be face-to-face and must be over the telephone or the Internet, connecting with people provides social support and strengthens resilience. Some find comfort in connecting with a higher power, whether through organized religion or privately. Many people find comfort by volunteering or helping others in some way.
- *Maintain a Hopeful Outlook* – Keep in mind that the world's best scientists are working to develop medications to keep a step ahead of infectious diseases and that, even though some have contracted the illness, many have survived it as well.
- *Take Care of Yourself* – Don't let your worry about getting sick be a barrier to staying well. Make time to eat properly, exercise and rest. Schedule time to do things you enjoy such as hobbies and social activities. Caring for yourself and even having fun will help you stay balanced and enable you to better deal with stressful times.
- *Keep Things in Perspective* – Realistically assess the risk of contagion. Find a credible source for your information. Since most news stories tend to report the "worst-case scenarios," be careful about believing everything you see, hear and read in the media. Consider limiting the amount of time you and your family spend watching and reading disease-related news coverage.
- *Take Decisive Actions* – There are certain things you can and should control. Trust yourself to make appropriate decisions if you are exposed and to respond appropriately if someone you love is exposed. Do take the precautions recommended by medical professionals, but maintain your daily routine as much as possible. Make a plan about what you would do if you were quarantined. Having an emergency plan in place that includes provisions for contacting your friends and family can be reassuring that you are prepared for the unexpected.

You probably already have skills that will enable you to handle the present situation. Recall the ways you have successfully handled hardships in the past, such as, the loss of a loved one, a divorce, or major illness. Draw on these skills to meet current challenges. Resilience can be an important part of your preventive care.

Developing resilience is a personal journey. An approach to building resilience that works for you might not work for someone else.

Strategies for Supporting Your Co-Workers

Healthcare workers and emergency responders are vulnerable to the stress reactions that can come from an ongoing infectious disease.

As a Supervisor:

- Have discussions with your team as to what it means to respond to an infectious disease for the long term. Do they have plans for themselves and their families if they need to work extra hours?
- Define roles and responsibilities.
- Rotate job duties as much as possible.
- Accompany and observe your team. Know the risk factors and watch for warning signs that they may be feeling overwhelmed.
- Be sensitive to recent life events that may impact a staff person's ability to respond.
- Set limits.
- Intervene/refer as necessary

As a Team Member:

- Pair up so that you may monitor one another's stress. Share the workload. Know your co-worker's history and stress reactions.
- Incorporate regular breaks, exercise, meals and rest.
- Utilize stress management methods; such as, deep breathing, writing in a journal, and/or exercise.
- Use counseling assistance programs available through your agency such as your Employee Assistance Program.

Signs to Watch For:

- Re-experiencing trauma that you thought had healed
- Hyperarousal
- Confusion
- Urge to escape/go numb (substance abuse)
- Withdrawal/Isolation

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

Michigan Department of Community Health

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