

# Be Red Cross Ready

## Taking Care of People with the Flu

If you are caring for a loved one with the flu, it's important to take steps to protect yourself and others. The main way that flu viruses spread is from person-to-person in droplets of coughs and sneezes. Flu viruses may also be spread when a person touches droplets on another person or an object and then touches their own mouth or nose (or someone else's mouth or nose) before washing their hands. To prevent spread it is important to remember hand washing and to cover your cough or sneeze.

Always follow the current advice of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and your local department of public health.

### Supplies to Keep on Hand

- Thermometer
- Soap
- Disposable gloves
- Acetaminophen
- Ibuprofen
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60-95% alcohol)
- Paper towels
- Tissues
- Facemasks and N95 respirators
- Bleach
- Disinfecting wipes
- Oral rehydration solution, or water, if unavailable

### Reducing the Spread of the Flu



- Get your flu shot(s) every year for the best chance of protection from the seasonal flu virus. Two shots will be needed for the 2009 flu season—one for seasonal flu and one for H1N1 flu.
- Take these common sense steps to reduce the spread of germs:
  - Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
  - Avoid or minimize contact with people who are sick (a minimum six feet distancing is recommended).
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth to prevent germs from entering your body.
  - Cover your mouth and nose with tissues when you cough and sneeze. Put used tissues in a wastebasket and then wash your hands.
  - If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow.
- Disinfect door knobs, switches, handles, toys and other surfaces that are commonly touched. You can use a bleach solution that contains ¼ cup of bleach for every gallon of water. Mix new solution each time you clean. You may also choose to use a commercially-produced surface disinfectant.
- It is okay to wash everyone's dishes and clothes together. Use detergent and very hot water. Wash your hands after handling dirty laundry.

### Taking Care of the Ill



- The person who is ill with the flu should stay in a room separate from common areas of the home and avoid contact with others as much as possible. The person should stay home for at least 24 hours after fever is gone without using fever-reducing medicines.
- Give fever-reducing medication such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Do NOT give aspirin to children or teens that have flu-like symptoms.
- Make sure the person who is ill receives lots of fluids and rest. Prevent dehydration by encouraging liquids at the first sign of the flu and follow these tips:
  - Give ice and easily digested foods such as soup and broth.
  - If the person has diarrhea or vomiting, give fluids that contain electrolytes. These are available at your pharmacy or grocery store and should be labeled 'oral rehydration solution,' which is different than sports drinks.
  - If drinking liquids makes nausea worse, give one sip at a time until the person can drink again.
- Persons ill with the flu should consider wearing a facemask, if available and tolerable, when they are sharing common spaces with other household members.
- Check with the person's health care provider initially about whether antiviral medication is recommended, or if fever persists, to determine if antibiotics are needed. Ensure all medications are taken as prescribed by their health care provider.
- Designate only one adult to be the caregiver. People at increased risk of severe illness from influenza should not be caregivers. If this is not possible, caregivers at increased risk should wear a facemask or N95 respirator.

### Taking Care of Yourself



- When parents and caregivers deal with crisis situations calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children and/or the people for whom they are caring.
- Taking care of someone else may cause you to lose sight of your own health or condition; remember to be mindful of your needs as well.
- Practice healthy habits to help maintain your body's resistance to infection, including:
  - Eat a healthy and balanced diet.
  - Drink plenty of water.
  - Exercise at least 3 times a week.
  - Manage stress.
  - Get enough sleep and rest.
- Caring for someone else, especially if they have a chronic condition can cause considerable stress. Common symptoms of stress include—
  - Sleep disturbances
  - Headaches
  - Muscle tension or aches
  - Changes in appetite
  - Skin problems
  - Anxiety
  - Depression, frustration and overreactions
- Dealing with stress:
  - Ask for help.
  - Make sure to express feelings to people you trust.
  - Get into a regular schedule including 7 to 8 hours of sleep, exercise and time to relax for yourself.
- For more information on dealing with stress and taking care of yourself or others contact your local Red Cross chapter or visit [RedCross.org](http://RedCross.org).

### Get medical care right away if the person who is sick:

- has difficulty breathing or chest pain;
- has purple or blue discoloration of the lips;
- is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down;
- has signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, absence of urination, or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry;
- has seizures (for example, uncontrolled convulsions);
- is less responsive than normal or becomes confused.

### Stay Informed

It is important to stay informed about changes to guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC Web site ([www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu](http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu)) posts regular updates to public health recommendations regarding a number of public health threats, including H1N1 (swine flu). Your local public health department is also a reliable source for information.