

TAKING CARE OF YOUR FAMILY DURING EMERGING INFECTIOUS DISEASE OUTBREAKS

Infectious disease outbreaks create a call to action for individuals and families to take responsibility for their health. Although leaders in science, medicine, and government closely monitor and seek solutions for disease outbreaks, the best way to protect one's family is through

... the best way to protect one's family is through staying informed, practicing good basic hygiene and preventive measures, engaging in strategies to help manage stress, and learning ways to involve your children in family health care.

staying informed, practicing good basic hygiene and preventive measures, engaging in strategies to help manage stress, and learning ways to involve your children in family health care.

Staying Informed

Reliable sources of information during an infectious disease outbreak help ensure family members are taking appropriate steps to stay healthy and address uncertainty about where to find accurate information. Up-to-date, accurate recommendations regarding disease prevention, self and family care, and travel guidance can be found at the following websites:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov
- American Red Cross: www.redcross.org
- Local American Red Cross chapter: www.redcross.org/where/chapters.asp

Information about infectious diseases for children:

- CDC: www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/index.html
- American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/Children-and-Disasters/Pages/default.aspx
- Schools are a reliable source of up-to-date health information about specific school recommendations and emergency plans. Plan for childcare in the event of school closure, which may involve taking leave or finding alternate care plans.

Good Basic Hygiene and Preventive Measures

- Avoid close contact with people who might be sick.
- Viruses spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing, and dispose of the tissue after use. If a tissue isn't available, cough or sneeze into your elbow, not your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Wash your hands regularly with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand-sanitizer.
- Wash your hands after coming home from public places, such as a school or playground.
- Clean frequently touched household surfaces with a disinfectant spray or wipes.
- If you get sick, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- Eat a balanced, nutritious diet and get enough sleep every night.
- Engage in exercise for stress reduction and overall good health.
- Make sure everyone in your house has received a flu shot. Because we are more familiar with the flu, people might not worry as much about it; however, it is an important preventive behavior.
- Provide additional support to children with special needs.
- Taking precautions to stay healthy is particularly important for at-risk groups, such as very young children, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems or other health conditions.

Strategies to Help Stay Calm

Uncertainty and concern about catching an infectious disease, and protecting oneself and one's family, can increase feelings of stress. There are effective ways for individuals and families to manage stress and concern:

- Stay up-to-date about developments related to the infectious disease outbreak by using a reliable and accurate source of health-related information, such as the CDC or the Red Cross.
- Limit media exposure. Use media resources to learn about updates, making sure to supervise children during its use, and then turn it off.
- Stick to your usual daily routine.
- Focus on positive aspects of your life and things that you can control.
- Seek social support from family members and/or friends and maintain social connections.
- Engage in relaxation techniques for stress reduction.
- Engage in physical activity and other enjoyable activities.
- If you or a family member is feeling overwhelmed, seek support from your health care provider or religious leader.

Ways to Involve Your Children in Family Health Care

Including your children in your family's health care plan will lead to better understanding, counter fear of the unknown, and help children and adolescents feel a sense of control.

- Ask children what they have heard about infectious disease.
- Provide age appropriate, accurate information and clarify any misinformation or misunderstanding they may have.
- Encourage children to share their concerns and let them know that parents and teachers are available to discuss thoughts and feelings.
- Parents' behaviors have a significant effect on children. Keep conversations calm and focused on the facts. Emphasize efforts that are being taken to contain the infectious disease.
- Model health-promoting behaviors for your children. For example, teach them to wash their hands with soap and water, reciting a nursery rhyme (e.g., Humpty Dumpty) that helps them understand how long they should wash.
- Educate the entire family about good health habits. Talk about what each family member can do to help others outside of the immediate family.
- When appropriate, include children in family plans and preventive behaviors.
- Address any misconceptions children may have that could result in stigmatizing people with connections to the country from which the viral outbreak originated.