



Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress

The Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS) is part of the Uniformed Services University's Department of Psychiatry, located in Bethesda, Maryland, and a partnering center of the Defense Center of Excellence (DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury.

HEALTH BEHAVIORS TO DECREASE RISK OF FLU TRANSMISSION

Good health practices can help reduce the spread of illness. Health care providers are often looked to for guidance, and in this role there is an excellent opportunity to educate (and reinforce) these practices. The following are some teachable and doable measures that can be communicated to families to help them stay informed and protect themselves.

How Can Patients Stay Informed?

Patients should have a reliable means of staying informed about the flu and any further recommendations or guidance they can use to protect themselves and their families. There are several reliable and well-established sources of information that are updated regularly:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
- American Red Cross: www.redcross.org
- Your local American Red Cross chapter: www.redcross.org/where/chapts.asp

What Can Patients Do to Protect Themselves From Getting Sick?

- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially if they cough and sneeze
- Alcohol-based hand cleaners and wipes are also effective
- Cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when they cough or sneeze. Throw it in the trash after use. If no tissue is available, then coughing into one's "elbow" is better than using one's hand.
- Avoid touching one's eyes, nose, and mouth. Germs spread this way
- Try to avoid close contact (less than 6 feet) with sick people
- If one feels ill or is ill, stay home from work or school and limit contact with other people to help prevent spreading illness

This fact sheet includes some teachable and doable measures that can be communicated to families to help them stay informed and protect themselves.

- Try to stay in good health (e.g., get plenty of sleep, keep stress levels down, maintain a nutritious diet, drink plenty of fluids, etc.)

What Can Patients Do If They Get Sick?

If they live in areas where swine flu cases have been identified and become ill with influenza-like symptoms, they may want to contact their health care provider, particularly if they are worried about their symptoms. The health care provider will determine whether testing and/or treatment is needed.

If they become ill, they should stay home and avoid contact with others as much as possible.

What are the Warning signs that Indicate the Need for Urgent Medical Attention?

In children, they include:

- Fast or troubled breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not waking up or interacting
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Fever with rash
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

In adults they include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

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What Can Families Do If They Must Care for a Loved One?

There are several helpful recommendations provided by the CDC.*

Keep the sick person away from others as much as possible. This may include:

- Keeping the sick person in a separate room away from the common area of the house (and separate bathroom, if possible)
- Keep this room's door closed
- Have the sick person wear a surgical mask if they need to be in the common area of the house
- Keeping visitors away (a phone call is safer than a visit)

Other helpful information includes:

- Have, if possible, only one adult in the house take care of the sick person
- Maintain, if possible, good ventilation in shared household areas (e.g., keeping windows open in restrooms, kitchen, bathrooms, etc.)

- Use paper towels for drying hands after washing or have dedicated cloth towels for each person in the home
- When holding small children who are sick, rest their chin on your shoulder so they will not cough in your face
- Avoid, if possible, re-using disposable face masks

What About Household Cleaning, Laundry, and Waste Disposal?

- Throw away tissues and other disposable items used by the sick person in the trash
- Keep surfaces clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant
- Linens, utensils, and dishes used by the sick person do not need to be cleaned separately, but should not be shared without washing thoroughly

* Information from CDC at www.cdc.gov/swineflu/swineflu_you.htm and http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/guidance_homecare.htm



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