

## Caring for Someone who is Sick with H1N1 Flu Virus

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Here are some ideas and suggestions to keep in mind when caring for someone who is sick.

Most people who get sick with influenza can be cared for at home. Pregnant women and people with medical problems should avoid providing direct care to those who are sick.

If you are alone or a single parent or responsible for the care of someone who is elderly, frail or has a disability and you have the flu, call someone to help you until you are feeling better.

### Step #1 Protect Yourself and Others

Clean your hands with either soap (liquid is preferred) and warm water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- before eating or drinking;
- before and after food preparation;
- before and after touching your eyes, nose or mouth;
- before and after using shared items like computers and common surfaces like doorknobs and handles;
- after coughing or sneezing;
- after wiping your nose or even someone else's nose;
- after touching items that the sick person has touched (such as dishes, towels and clothes);
- after taking out garbage.

If you can see dirt on your hands, always wash with soap and water first.

Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. They are safe for children to use under adult supervision.

Fragrances in some alcohol-based sanitizers may cause reactions in some people.

Teach children and others how and when to clean their hands.

There is no evidence that wearing a mask will protect you from getting the flu. However, if you choose to wear a mask, wash your hands before and after putting on or taking off the mask.

### Step #2 Allow the Sick Person to Rest (away from others)

Anyone sick with the flu will need lots of rest and may be contagious for about seven days after symptoms start.

The sick person should stay home until their fever has been gone for 24 hours and they are feeling better and able to go back to their normal activities. The person

may still have a cough for several days to weeks, but can return to school or work even if they are coughing as long as they are otherwise better.

Health care providers should remain off work until 24 hours after all symptoms, other than a mild cough have resolved.

Avoid having visitors in the home.

If possible, try keeping the sick person in a well ventilated room of their own and avoid contact with the rest of the family. Try to maintain a distance of 2 meters between you and the sick person. Of course, keep a close eye on sick children.

When holding a child who is sick, place their chin on your shoulder so that they do not cough in your face.

Plan ahead for other child care arrangements in case your child becomes ill and will not be going to school or daycare.

### Step #3 Treat the Symptoms

Fever often comes with chills or aches and pains. Certain medications (such as acetaminophen - for example Tylenol®, or ibuprofen - for example Advil®) may help to reduce these symptoms. Do not give acetylsalicylic acid or ASA - for example Aspirin®, to children or teenagers under age 16 to treat a fever. It has been linked to Reye's Syndrome, a potentially fatal disease associated with aspirin consumption by children with viral diseases.

To reduce muscle pain, apply heat carefully for short periods of time using a hot water bottle or heating pad.

For a stuffy nose, use saline drops

To ease a sore throat, try gargling with warm water or suck on hard candy or lozenges

## **Step #4 Give Lots of Fluids and Nutritious Food and Ensure a Smoke-free Environment**

Warm drinks, such as tea with honey and lemon or chicken soup, can be very soothing for a sore throat.

The sick person may not have an appetite, but simple foods may be welcomed.

Always keep some extra non-perishable foods, like juice, canned soup and fruits and vegetables, stored at home in case you are unable to get to a store.

Avoid alcohol and caffeine.

Cigarette smoking is hard on the lungs of a person with an infection. The sick person should avoid smoking. Second-hand smoke is harmful also, so people should not smoke around the sick person.

## **Step #5 Keep the Sick Person's Things Separate**

Each sick person should have his/her own personal items (towel, face cloth, toothbrush etc.) and they should be kept separate from the belongings of others in the house. Wash your hands after touching the items belonging to the sick person and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Clean items (such as the phone, TV remote) and surfaces that the sick person has touched using normal household disinfectant. The virus can survive on hard surfaces for up to 48 hours.

## **Step #6 Stay Alert for Complications**

When treated at home with proper care, most people will begin to feel better after a few days. Take the sick person's temperature daily to track any fever.

Make sure you have a list of phone numbers for family, friends, neighbours, your health care provider and Telehealth (1-866-797-0000) available by your phone.

## **IMPORTANT**

The following symptoms may indicate complications and the sick person may need immediate medical care:

- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Rapid or difficulty breathing, or wheezing
- Bluish or grey skin color
- Bloody or coloured mucus/spit
- Sudden dizziness or confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Seizures

- High fever that does not go away or comes back after 4-5 days
- Low blood pressure
- Dehydration (people may be dizzy when they stand up, they are not urinating, ill infants may not have tears when they cry)

Additional symptoms to watch for in children:

- Any fever in a baby less than 3 months of age
- Not drinking enough fluids or not eating
- Not waking up or interacting
- Irritable or not wanting to play or be held

## **People at Risk of Complications**

The following groups are not more likely to get the flu. However, they are more at risk of developing complications if they do get sick:

- Children under five years of age (especially those less than two years old)
- People who are 65 years of age and older
- Women who are pregnant or who has had a baby in the last 6 weeks
- People who are very overweight
- People with medical problems such as:
  - lung problems, including asthma
  - heart problems
  - cancer
  - diabetes
  - liver disease
  - kidney disease
  - blood disorders such as anemia
  - neurological problems
  - immune system problems caused by disease or medications, including HIV

Early treatment can help to reduce the risk of complications, so it's important that people at risk of complications speak to a medical professional if they develop flu symptoms, and seek medical care

if the symptoms worsen. Health care providers may recommend an antiviral drug to help the person feel better sooner and prevent complications.

Inform your health care provider that the person has symptoms of influenza before or as soon as they arrive so that proper precautions can be taken to prevent spread to others.