

H1N1 Fact Sheet

November 18, 2009

Family Preparedness

There are 10 easy steps to follow this flu season to protect you from getting ill, while providing care to your friends and family.

- 1. Keep your distance:** Minimize contact with the person you are caring for. Although you will care and comfort them, encourage the sick person to stay in their own room. This will reduce the spread of the virus throughout the household.
- 2. Wash your hands often:** Even when hands look clean, everyone in the home should wash their hands often using soap and warm water, or a 60 to 90 per cent alcohol-based hand sanitizer:
 - before and after being close to someone who is sick;
 - after being in a sick person's room, or touching anything that a sick person has touched, such as dishes, towels, clothes or trash;
 - before you prepare and eat food;
 - before touching your eyes, nose or mouth;
 - when coughing or sneezing into a tissue.
- 3. Cover coughs and sneezes:** To reduce the spread of infection, cough or sneeze into your arm or sleeve.
- 4. Stay at home until feeling well:** The sick person should not go out in public. They should remain at home from work, school or other social activities until they are feeling well and able to resume normal day-to-day activities.
- 5. Keep common surfaces clean:** Ensure that common surfaces such as door knobs, light switches, phones, keyboards and other hard surfaces are cleaned at least once a day to reduce the spread of the virus. Clean and disinfect items used by the sick person and make sure the sick person has their own towel, toothbrush, face cloth and other personal items.
- 6. Drink fluids and eat nutritious foods:** Provide the sick person with plenty of warm drinks to soothe sore throats. Also, give them nutritious, simple foods such as cooked oatmeal, mashed vegetables, bananas, rice, apples and toast.
- 7. Open windows:** Fresh air is best. If weather permits, open windows to keep rooms well ventilated.
- 8. Keep the air smoke-free:** Smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke is especially hard on the lungs when there is an infection. Ensure that no one smokes near the sick person.
- 9. Treat the fever:** Fever often comes with chills or aches and pains. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen may help bring down the fever and take away the aches. For children, acetaminophen is recommended. If you are using ibuprofen with children, only give it to them if they are drinking lots of fluids. Do not give aspirin to children. A cool face cloth to the face and neck or body can help bring down the fever. When taking medication, follow the instructions on the label or the directions given by your health care provider.

10. Be on alert for complications: Most people will begin to feel better after a few days. Sometimes complications develop, such as pneumonia. Asthma, diabetes and heart disease may worsen. Contact a health care provider if the sick person:

- starts to feel better, then fever returns and illness worsens;
- experiences wheezing, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing;
- notices blood in the phlegm;
- experiences chest pain;
- is hard to wake up, unusually quiet, or unresponsive;
- experiences hallucinations;
- has new onset of diarrhea, vomiting, or abdominal pain after starting to feel better

Make a plan. Have a kit. Be prepared.

Knowing how to take care of someone is just one part of being prepared. But, what if you live alone or know of someone who lives alone?

Have extra supplies on hand in case you or a family member becomes ill and isn't able to leave the house. Some supplies include:

- canned or frozen foods and juice;
- hand soap and hand sanitizer;
- pain/fever medication;
- thermometer;
- extra prescription medications

If you live alone, are a single parent, or are the main caregiver in your household, reach out now to a friend, neighbour, or family member who can help if you become ill. That person could:

- run errands;
- pick-up medication;
- walk your pet;
- bring you groceries.

If you are well, offer your help to a neighbour who may need it.

Resources

Check this website for regular updates: www.gov.ns.ca/h1n1

See this website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.fightflu.ca

Influenza Decision Chart: <http://www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/publications/Influenza-Decision-Chart.pdf>

Flu assessment centres will also be a useful resource in many communities.

If you have any concerns or questions, contact HealthLink 811.

