



# PANDEMIC FLU

PUBLIC INFORMATION SERIES

## Preparing for a Flu Pandemic Fact Sheet

### Coping and Emotional Well-Being

*What is a pandemic? Who is at risk? What will happen?* As the media reports about the possibility of a flu pandemic, these thoughts may occur to you. Knowing what to expect, how to prepare and where to find needed information can increase your resilience and minimize the pandemic's impact on you and your loved ones.

#### What to Expect

A flu pandemic is a global outbreak of disease that occurs when a new influenza virus appears to which people have little or no immunity. It affects people of all ages, backgrounds and locations, causing much illness and death as well as social disruption. During a flu pandemic:

- Many people are likely to become ill at the same time.
- Infected people may be isolated, which means that they are separated from healthy people to reduce the chances of spreading the flu.
- People who have been exposed to the virus may be quarantined.
- Many things may shut down or be canceled, including public transportation, gathering places, events, schools and businesses.
- Community services and utilities may be disrupted.
- Health care services could become overwhelmed.

These circumstances could significantly impact you. You may need to reorganize your life to care for loved ones or to receive care. You may lose income if your workplace closes or you become ill. School closures can result in the need for home-schooling or other activities for homebound children. Access to food and other household goods may become limited. The many changes in day-to-day living can cause anxiety and stress.

#### Coping with Stress and Anxiety

Some ways that you can cope with stress and anxiety are—

- Get accurate information from reliable sources.
- Educate yourself about the flu pandemic.

- Maintain your normal daily routine, if you can.
- Exercise, eat well and rest.
- Stay active — physically and mentally.
- Stay in touch with family and friends.
- Find comfort in your spiritual and personal beliefs.
- Keep a sense of humor.

#### Coping Through Preparedness

Being adequately prepared can significantly affect how you cope with a stress and anxiety during a flu pandemic. It will help you feel more in control and lower your stress. Consider adopting the following preparedness actions:

- Reduce the likelihood of infection by using good personal hygiene and self-care practices.
  - Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizer.
  - Cough or sneeze into a tissue, and place used tissues directly into the trash.
  - If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow or upper sleeve.
  - After coughing or sneezing, clean your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
  - Stay at home if you are ill.
- Make a plan among your family and friends for taking care of one another should one of you become ill.
- Talk with your family and friends about how they will be cared for if they become ill.
- Keep at least a two-week supply of non-perishable easy-to-prepare foods, water and other critical household and hygiene goods.
- Keep a supply of medical supplies, prescription and non-prescription drugs.
- Investigate how your health insurance carrier plans to handle costs of treatment during a pandemic.
- Check with your employer regarding policies for dealing with a pandemic.
- Ask about plans at your child's school or daycare for dealing with a pandemic, and develop plans now for how you would keep homebound children occupied.

## Increase Your Psychological Resilience

Certain strategies can increase your resilience and encourage new emotional strengths. The following tips can help you deal with life's difficulties, including a pandemic.

### *Identify how you cope with a crisis*

Identify your coping strengths. What crises have occurred in your life? How did they affect you? How did you cope, and how did your coping style work or not work for you? Are there other ways you might cope?

### *Foster healthy attitudes and beliefs*

Crises and difficult circumstances are stressful but can be overcome. Look for all ways unfortunate situations can be bettered and focus on problem solving.

### *Choose nurturing and healthy behaviors*

Identify your goals and move toward them, even though progress may seem slow at times. Take decisive action in protecting and preparing yourself and your loved ones, rather than letting the pandemic situation make your choices for you.

## Professional Help

Seek professional mental health care for yourself or your loved ones if you or they experience—

- Loss of sleep, frequent nightmares or disruptive and intrusive thoughts.
- Feelings of depression or feelings that lead to an inability to engage in usual activities.
- Disorientation, extreme memory difficulties or losing awareness of time, date and place.
- Hallucinations or delusions occur, such as hearing or seeing things that are not there, extremely unrealistic thinking or excessive preoccupation with an idea or thought.
- A previously-identified mental health condition recurring or becoming worse.

If these circumstances occur, contact your personal physician or mental health provider. If you are currently working with a mental health provider, ask how services will be provided during a pandemic, and consider or discuss how you might get needed support or assistance from family and friends. You can also seek local mental health resources by contacting the U.S. National Mental Health Information Center at [www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/databases/](http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/databases/) or call 1-800-789-2647.

## Stay Informed

- Be aware of the status of the pandemic in the media.
- Seek information on public services that may close, requiring you to plan ahead.
- Follow updates provided by local public health authorities and personal health care providers.

You can find additional information on planning and preparing for pandemic flu at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) and [www.pandemicflu.gov/](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/).

## Stay Connected

Stay in touch with others by telephone, e-mail and other means should you be unable to get around due to movement restriction measures.

### Emergency Contact Card



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Important Phone Numbers

Local Health Department: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Local Red Cross Chapter: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Family Health Provider: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Mental Health Provider: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

During a pandemic or other disaster, you can let others know of your well-being by registering on the Safe and Well Web site: <https://disastersafe.redcross.org/>.



**American Red Cross**