

# Swine Flu: A Stress Management Guide

*As our nation prepares for the possibility of a swine flu outbreak, it is natural that we would feel some stress about what might happen. This guide can help us in preparing emotionally for the flu.*

## What can we LEARN TO HELP US COPE?

- Learning symptoms, knowing how the flu is spread and knowing possible risk factors will aid us in monitoring ourselves and family members during an actual outbreak in our geographic area. Good sources for information include: [www.flu.oregon.gov](http://www.flu.oregon.gov) and [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).
- Educating ourselves about how the flu will impact our lives, including home, school, work, economy and infrastructure, can assist us in managing stress for ourselves and our families.
- Finding out about school and work plans will help us prepare for changes to our personal routines and activities.
- Planning for how to balance the need for information to prepare and protect ourselves with the risk of greater anxiety that may be caused by too much media viewing.

## How does PLANNING HELP US COPE WITH OUR EMOTIONS?

- Preparedness can help reduce our risks and deal with our fears.
- Following good health practices for ourselves and our children and supporting each other emotionally requires planning, practice and resources.

## How can we PROTECT OURSELVES EMOTIONALLY?

- We should become educated and offer support to those working on behalf of our health and safety.
- Fear is a natural human emotion. Constructive fear motivates us to make and carry out a personal plan, help others plan, and practice stress management. Everyone may have different relaxation and coping strategies but some helpful options include meditation, breathing or relaxation, exercise, reading, or keeping a journal.
- Even when we try to protect ourselves and loved ones, some of us may get sick. We should not allow ourselves to assume unwarranted guilt when this occurs.
- Keep updated about what is happening, but limit exposure to negative information, especially for children and other family members who may not be able to keep things in perspective. Set times for getting updates, but do not “bombard” yourself or your family with negative media.

## Strong emotions are normal reactions to concerns about flu outbreaks:

We need to remind ourselves that what we are feeling is normal. For adults and children the following reactions are not unusual:

Emotional:	Shock, sadness, anger, guilt, helplessness, despair, worry, apathy, grief, closeness, helpfulness, nurturing
Cognitive:	Confusion, memory loss, exaggeration, blaming, poor concentration, limited attention span
Behavioral:	Isolation, change in sleeping patterns and eating habits, social outreaching or withdrawal
Physical:	Fatigue, headaches, hair loss, increased heartbeat, Stomachaches, decreased appetite, increased alertness
Spiritual:	Increase/decrease in faith, questioning beliefs system, anger towards God, increased self evaluation, adjustments in personal goals and values

#### TAKING ACTION:

- Learn what you can do in advance. Create a plan and then lead your lives in a normal way.
- Identify local sources of trusted information and follow their guidance.
- Build resilience in yourself and your children's lives by learning to identify emotions and positive ways to respond behaviorally.
- Know that our daily lives may be significantly different during a swine flu outbreak. Doing something to help others helps us.
- Be involved in faith-based and other community organizations and identify ways that the groups can maintain communication, commitment and outreach.
- Work with neighbors/family members with special needs who may be in group homes, nursing homes or other facilities regarding their personal and the facility's emergency plan to identify additional preparedness efforts you can undertake.
- Seek support from family, neighbors, friends and colleagues.
- Make use of available community services.
- Continue your daily schedule at work as well as your leisure activities unless advised differently by the Health authorities
- Seek professional mental health assistance if things feel like they are falling apart emotionally. If you feel depressed, if there is not a medical explanation for chronic physical problems, or if you feel hopelessness or extreme anger, there is help available to assist you.