

Coping with Swine Flu Fear Managing the Emotional Consequences



The Human Factor in Business Continuity Planning™

The Emotional Impact of Public Health Emergencies

The emotional impact of public health emergencies can have a powerful effect on the mental health of individuals of all ages.

People naturally become alarmed when they believe that their health may be threatened.

During times of heightened concerns regarding public health risks, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), avian influenza and other illnesses,



it is important to take care of yourself and to monitor your own emotional reaction.

Tending to your own mental health and emotional needs will make you a better, more reliable resource for friends and family members in their times of need. ♦

Emotional Reactions to Public Health Emergencies

While everyone reacts in their own way to a public health risk, some of the more typical reactions may include:

Physical Changes

- Increased stress
- Headaches, fatigue
- Elevated pulse, blood pressure
- Changes in appetite
- Unusual aches or pains
- Sleeping poorly

Emotional Changes

- Panic, anxiety
- Distrust, fear
- Anger, irritability
- Sadness, depression
- Blame-Feeling overwhelmed

MORE ➞

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Sources of Credible Information

There are many sources of credible information about public health emergencies, including your State and Local Health Departments and the CDC. You may wish to visit the following websites:

www.cdc.gov
www.cdc.gov/swineflu/
[s_cid=swineFlu_outbr
eak internal 001](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/outbreaks/swineflu_outbreak_internal_001)

Emotional Reactions to Public Health Emergencies (continued)

Changes in Thinking

- Impaired concentration
- Problems with work or school
- Memory problems
- Obsessive thoughts
- Preoccupation with health issues

Behavioral Changes

- Isolating or avoiding others
- Possible increased alcohol or substance use
- Excessive cleaning or washing
- Overly-cautious, jumpiness

Keep in mind that these are all normal reactions to abnormal circumstances. ♦

Strategies for Coping

“Be aware that watching too much television about health risks can be upsetting.”



In the face of uncertainty about health risks, it is important to keep the extent of the danger in perspective.

The vast majority of us are not in danger and should go about our daily routines without significant fears of contracting SARS, Avian Influenza or other contagious diseases. This is the advice of medical experts.

As a way of managing fears related to public health risks, you should keep yourself informed but not preoccupied with media reports and credible information.

You may wish to visit the Federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention website for fact sheets or call your family physician, but in general, keeping yourself informed with timely, accurate information can alleviate some of the fear of the unknown.

Be aware that watching too much television about health risks can be upsetting, for you and for others around you, including young children. ♦



Staying Connected

The fear associated with a public health emergency can push people apart. Families and communities that are usually close and connected may respond to fears about contamination and contagious disease by isolating or avoiding social contact.

If isolation becomes necessary, local public health officials will tell you how to protect yourself and your loved ones. Until then, it is important to stay connected at home, at work and in the community.

Often the best source of assistance in dealing with the emotional aspect of emergencies is found in each other. If you are anxious about a health risk, talk to someone you love or trust. This may be a family member, friend, clergy member or teacher. Just don't keep your fears to yourself.

If you notice that a loved one, friend or co-worker's behavior has substantially changed, reach out and ask them how they are doing. Make some time to talk, when it is convenient for both of you, and follow up later on to see how they are doing. Watching out for each other demonstrates that you care and it can be comforting to both of you.

If you or someone that you know is having an acute emotional reaction that does not subside over the period of a few days, it may be best to seek the assistance of a medical or mental health professional. ♦

♦



"The fear associated with a public health emergency can push people apart."

Techniques for Managing Stress and Anxiety

Here are some useful suggestions for coping with the stress and anxiety stemming from a public health emergency:

- Limit your exposure to graphic news stories
- Get accurate, timely information from credible sources
- Seek out and follow the experts' advice
- Educate yourself about the specific health hazard
- Maintain your normal daily routine
- Exercise, eat well and rest
- Stay busy-physically and mentally
- Communicate with friends, family and supporters
- Use spirituality and your personal beliefs
- Keep a sense of humor
- Express yourself through writing, poetry, drawing, etc.
- Talk and share your feelings with others

For many people, calming fears and anxieties can be difficult.

If you find that the ideas listed above are not enough, you may wish to learn more about employee assistance services by contacting your human resources representative. ♦

**The Human Factor in
Business Continuity
Planning**



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