

# American Red Cross

## Home Care for Pandemic Flu

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this presentation is to provide participants with the skills and knowledge to protect themselves from influenza during a flu pandemic, and take care of loved ones with signs and symptoms of flu at home.

### **PRESENTATION OBJECTIVES**

After completing this presentation, participants should know —

- Signs and symptoms of the flu.
- The difference between seasonal flu and pandemic flu.
- Steps to take to protect yourself and others from getting pandemic flu.
- Steps to take when you observe signs and symptoms of pandemic flu in a loved one.
  - When the person should stay home.
  - How to treat symptoms.
  - When to seek medical help.
- How to prepare your household for a flu pandemic.
- How the Red Cross can help you in the event of a pandemic.

## **TOPIC: RECOGNIZING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF THE FLU**

### **Test Your Flu IQ True or False Statements**

1. The most common signs and symptoms of the flu include fever, cough, runny nose and muscle pain.
2. During a pandemic, you should call your health-care professional at the first sign of the flu.
3. It is important to wash your hands at least three times a day if you are caring for someone who has signs and symptoms of the flu.
4. If someone starts to show signs and symptoms of the flu, he or she can continue their normal routine for about three days.
5. Families should make a Pandemic Flu Plan, similar to a Family Disaster Plan.

### **Answers:**

1. True. Other symptoms include diarrhea, extreme tiredness, headache and sore throat.
2. True.
3. False: Wash your hands often.
4. False: They should stay home.
5. True.

### **The most common signs and symptoms of the flu include —**

- Fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Muscle pain

## TOPIC: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SEASONAL AND PANDEMIC FLU

Seasonal Flu	Pandemic Flu
Caused by influenza viruses that are similar to those already affecting people.	Caused by a new influenza virus that people have not been exposed to before. Likely to be more severe, affect more people, and cause more deaths than seasonal flu because people will not have immunity to the new virus.
Symptoms include fever, cough, runny nose, and muscle pain. Deaths can be caused by complications such as pneumonia.	Symptoms similar to the common flu may be more severe and complications more serious.
Healthy adults usually not at risk for serious complications (the very young, the elderly, and those with certain underlying health conditions at increased risk for serious complications).	Healthy adults may also be at increased risk for serious complications.
Generally causes modest impact on society (e.g., some school closings, encouragement of people who are sick to stay home).	A severe pandemic could change the patterns of daily life for some time. People may choose to stay home to keep away from others who are sick. Also, people may need to stay home to care for ill family and loved ones. Travel and public gatherings could be limited. Basic services and access to supplies could be disrupted.

**During a pandemic flu, it is extremely important to take precautions in your own home to prevent its spread. These precautions include —**

- Practicing good hand hygiene.
- Ensuring that household members stay home if they show signs and symptoms of the flu and avoiding contact with others.
- Disinfecting surfaces that might harbor germs when a household member has the flu.
- Following the advice of the CDC and your local health department.

## TOPIC: PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF FLU

These healthy habits will help keep you and others from getting and passing on the virus:

- **Clean your hands** often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze** and clean your hands afterwards. Put used tissues in the waste basket.
- **Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue.**
- **Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth** to keep flu germs from entering your body.

Anyone with signs and symptoms of the flu during a flu pandemic should —

- **Stay home** from work, school and errands and avoid contact with others.
- **Consider wearing a surgical mask** when around others. There may be benefits.

The flu virus is spread through contaminated droplets that exit the mouth and nose of a person who has the flu. When someone with the flu coughs or sneezes, the virus can get in the air directly around them (within three feet), on objects near them and their hands. People may get the flu when they breathe in droplets from the air or when they touch people or objects that are contaminated and then touch their own mouth, eyes, or nose.

- The good news is that germs are easily washed away.

## **Washing Away Germs When a Household Member Is Sick**

The most important step that everyone should take to protect household members who are not ill in the home is for every member to clean their hands often.

Caregivers should always clean their hands before and immediately after contact with a person with the flu. They should also clean them:

- After coughing or sneezing;
- Before, during, and after preparing food;
- Before eating, and after using the bathroom;
- After handling trash, garbage or animal waste;
- When coming into the home from public places

### **Follow these steps for proper hand hygiene:**

1. Wet hands with warm, running water and apply liquid soap.
2. Rub hands vigorously for at least 20 seconds, covering all surfaces and fingers.
3. Scrub nails by rubbing them against the palms of your hands.
4. Rinse your hands with water.
5. Dry your hands thoroughly with a paper towel, use it to turn off the faucet.
6. Apply alcohol-based hand cleaner and rub it in well.

**Disinfecting at home when a household member has pandemic flu include the following:**

1. Disinfect door knobs, switches, handles, toys and any surfaces that are commonly touched around the home or workplace. Use a fresh mixture of one-quarter cup bleach with one gallon of water, or if you need a smaller quantity use one tablespoon of bleach in one quart of water.
2. Clean dishes in the dishwasher. If you wash dishes by hand in your home use very hot water and put bleach in the rinse water to disinfect them – one-quarter cup for every gallon of water.
3. Wash your hands after handling dirty laundry. It is okay to wash everyone's clothes together.
4. Wear disposable gloves when in contact with or cleaning body fluids. Clean up with paper towels and dispose of them in the waste basket.
5. Keep everyone's personal items separate. When a household member has the signs and symptoms of the flu, all members of the household should avoid sharing computers, pens, papers, clothes, towels, sheets, blankets, food or eating utensils.

**Frequently Asked Question**

**Q.** Can I use any household disinfectant to clean surfaces in my home instead of the bleach and water mixture?

**A.** Yes

## **Frequently Asked Questions:**

### **Q. Where do I get a surgical mask?**

**A.** You can purchase a N95 surgical mask from a pharmacy, hardware store or on-line.

### **Q. Should I wear a surgical mask if I am caring for someone who has the flu?**

**A.** Once a flu virus is airborne, it is not easily filtered out of the air by a surgical mask. However, caregivers may wear a mask, if they choose. The person who has the flu should wear a surgical mask because it can effectively stop germs before they become airborne. Check for up-to-date mask usage information at [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov) or [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org).

### **Q. Should I wear a mask when I am out in public, especially if I am using public transportation, such as buses, trains or airplanes?**

**A.** Wearing a mask in public will help protect others if you have the flu. However, it is not known whether it will protect you from getting the flu. If you are unable to avoid public transportation during a pandemic, pay attention to CDC recommendations for mask usage. A mask might provide some protection.

### **Q. When I'm providing care do I need a gown or other personal protective equipment like health professionals use?**

**A.** It is not known at this time if that will be necessary. Check at [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov) for the most up to date infection control recommendations for the home.

### **Q. If everyone in my household is vaccinated against the seasonal flu, will we be protected against a pandemic flu?**

**A.** No, it won't protect you against pandemic influenza. But flu shots can help you to stay healthy. Get a flu shot to help protect yourself from seasonal flu. Get a pneumonia shot to prevent secondary infection if you are over the age of 65 or have a chronic illness such as diabetes or asthma. For specific guidelines, talk to your health care provider or call the CDC Hotline at 1 (800) 232-4636. Make sure that your family's immunizations are up-to-date.

### **Q. Is it possible to get bird flu from eating poultry?**

**A.** Yes, but it is safe to eat properly cooked poultry. Cooking destroys germs, including the bird flu virus. The United States bans imports of poultry and poultry products from countries where bird flu has been found. Guidelines for the safe preparation of poultry include the following:

- ▶ Wash hands before and after handling food.
- ▶ Keep raw poultry and its juices away from other foods.
- ▶ Keep hands, utensils, and surfaces, such as cutting boards, clean.
- ▶ Use a food thermometer to ensure poultry has been fully cooked. Cooking poultry to the recommended temperature (165 degrees F) will kill the virus. More information on how to properly cook poultry can be found at [www.usda.gov/birdflu](http://www.usda.gov/birdflu).

## **TOPIC: MONITOR A LOVED ONE WHO HAS THE PANDEMIC FLU**

- Call your loved one's health-care professional at the first signs and symptoms of the flu. The health-care professional can advise you on the appropriate care steps you should take.
- Keep a care log. At least every four hours or when signs and symptoms change, write down the date, time, temperature, symptoms, and type and dosage of medications given.
- Have your care log handy when you talk with your doctor. A care log will enable you to give more accurate information on your loved one's condition to your health care professional.
- Be sure to call the health-care professional again if your loved one has the following signs and symptoms:
  - High fever;
  - Greater than 105° F (40.5° C) for an adult or child
  - 103° F (39.4° C) or higher for a baby three to 24 months old
  - Rectal temperature of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher for a baby up to three months old
  - Shaking chills;
  - Coughing that produces thick, yellowish-greenish colored mucus;
  - Dehydration (feeling of dry mouth or excessive thirst);
  - Worsening of an existing serious medical condition (such as, heart or lung disease, diabetes, HIV or cancer).

Call your health care professional or the emergency medical system (EMS) right away if your loved one has signs and symptoms of the flu plus any of these additional worrisome signals:

- Irritability;
- Confusion;
- Difficulty breathing or chest pain with each breath;
- Bluish skin;
- Stiff neck;
- Inability to move an arm or leg;
- First-time seizure.

## **TOPIC: CARING FOR A LOVED ONE WHO HAS THE PANDEMIC FLU**

A person who has signs and symptoms of the flu during a pandemic should —

- Get lots of rest;
- Drink plenty of liquids to prevent dehydration;
- Avoid alcohol and tobacco;
- Take medications to reduce a fever and relieve flu symptoms;
- Contact their health care professional.

In some cases, your health-care professional may prescribe certain antiviral drugs to treat the flu. Since the flu is caused by a virus, antibiotics, such as penicillin, will not cure it.

### **Prevent Dehydration**

- With the flu, dehydration occurs when the body loses too much water and it is not replaced quickly enough. It can be serious.
- To avoid dehydration, give soothing drinks at the first signs of the flu. Also give ice and light, easily-digested foods, such as soup and broth.
- If your loved one has a fever, diarrhea or vomiting, give fluids that contain electrolytes. Soup, broth and fruit juices are good sources.
- Electrolyte drinks are also available at your pharmacy or grocery store. You may make your own re-hydration electrolyte drink for people over the age of 12 by mixing one quart water, one-half teaspoon baking soda, one-half teaspoon table salt, three to four tablespoons sugar and one-quarter teaspoon salt substitute (“lite” salt). Mix it up well and flavor it with lemon juice or sugarless Kool-Aid® powder, and add crushed ice if desired.
- If drinking liquids makes nausea worse, give your loved one a sip of fluids at a time until he or she can drink again.

## **Reduce a Fever**

Always follow the advice of the health-care professional. If there is a delay in being able to speak to a health-care professional, follow these care steps to help lower a fever:

- Give plenty of fluids to help prevent dehydration. Not getting enough water when you have the flu can cause serious health complications.
- Give fever-reducing medication, such as acetaminophen, aspirin or ibuprofen, as directed on the container's label. Do not give aspirin to anyone younger than 20.
- Keep a record of your loved one's temperature in your care log.
- To make your loved one more comfortable when a fever is high give a sponge bath with lukewarm water.

If there is a delay in getting help, talk with a health professional on the phone and let him or her know what care you are giving. If the fever is very high ask if you should start an additional dose of an alternate fever-reducing medication.

## **TOPIC: PREPARE FOR A FLU PANDEMIC**

Just like making a family disaster plan, you should make a plan for a flu pandemic. The plan should include how your family members will cope if schools are closed, or if they cannot go to work, or to any public gathering, and if groceries and gas stations are closed.

Use the attached guidelines to assist you with your planning and preparation.

## **TOPIC: CONCLUSION**

You should seek advice from your health-care professional, the CDC and your local health department to make sure any medication, treatment or vaccination is appropriate to your health. As with all medications and treatments, there are side effects and potential complications.

It is important to stay informed about the potential threat of a public health emergency, such as pandemic flu.

Everyone should be aware of the evolving situation. Heed the advice of health officials and government agencies. You can stay informed by visiting official Web sites, such as those by HHS, CDC and the World Health Organization. Visit [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov).