

# Flu

## What You Can Do



## Caring for People at Home



Massachusetts Department  
of Public Health



LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH  
Institute of Massachusetts

Dear Massachusetts Resident,

You have probably heard talk about the flu (or influenza) in recent years, including information about who should get the flu vaccine and concerns about a flu pandemic. While flu can cause some worry, there are important things that you can do to protect yourself against the flu and to be ready to care for someone who has the flu. This booklet was created to help you prepare. It has a special focus on how to care for people at home when they are sick with the flu.

**Seasonal flu** affects people every year. Most people who get the flu can be cared for at home. The simple steps described in this booklet can make caring for someone with the flu easier to do.

**Pandemic flu** occurs when a new flu virus develops that spreads quickly and infects large numbers of people at the same time. We do not know when a flu pandemic may occur. But being prepared for seasonal flu will also help you in the event of a pandemic. We encourage you to read this booklet, prepare your home by following the recommendations, and keep this booklet on hand in case you need it later.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health and its partners in government, health care and emergency planning are preparing for all types of emergencies, including a flu pandemic, that could affect your community. We thank you for taking the time to prepare yourself and your family for the flu, and in doing so, making your entire community better prepared.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Auerbach". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "A".

John Auerbach

Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Public Health

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# About Flu Care at Home

When you care for a family member who has the flu, it is helpful to have some guidelines. This booklet was designed to help you:

- **Prepare** for seasonal and pandemic flu,
- **Reduce the risk** that you and others in your home will get the flu,
- **Care for someone at home** who has the flu, and
- **Know when to get medical advice and medical care.**

This booklet provides information about caring for family members with the flu. It also applies to care that you may provide to others in your neighborhood and community.

## What is the Flu?

**Seasonal flu** is caused by influenza viruses that infect people every year. In New England, flu season usually begins in December and lasts until April.

The most common flu symptoms are:

- Sudden onset of fever
- Tiredness or weakness
- Body aches
- Dry cough

### WHAT IS PANDEMIC FLU?

**Pandemic flu** can occur when a new influenza virus develops. Most people will not have any immunity, which means they will not be able to fight off this new virus. This may allow the virus to spread easily from person to person, and cause many people around the world to get the flu. This is called a **flu pandemic**. There have been three pandemics in the last hundred years. No one knows when another pandemic may occur.



A **“stomach bug”** (*illness with diarrhea and vomiting*) is different from the flu. A “stomach bug” is caused by other germs, not influenza viruses.

**The common cold** is also different from the flu. The most common symptoms of a cold are a stuffy nose, sneezing, cough, and sore throat. Colds are usually milder than the flu and do not come on as suddenly.

This booklet is about prevention and care for **both** seasonal and pandemic flu. Much of the care you give to family members who get seasonal flu will be the same as the care provided for pandemic flu. In each section of this booklet, you will find information about what might be different during a pandemic.

### GETTING MEDICAL ADVICE

This booklet is not a substitute for professional medical advice. It is important to talk to a doctor about how flu may affect you and your family based on your own health needs. Throughout this booklet, there are references to talking with a doctor. You can also talk to a nurse or any other healthcare provider who takes care of your family members.

## Special Health Care Needs

If you or a family member has a chronic illness such as diabetes, asthma, heart disease, or other special health care needs, you should check with a doctor before flu season

about how flu care might be different. Ask the doctor what symptoms to look for, and how to know when to get medical care.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

- MDPH Flu Website at [www.mass.gov/dph/flu](http://www.mass.gov/dph/flu)
- Call MDPH at **617-983-6800** or **888-658-2850**
- Your local health department
- **My Flu Care Resources** section of this booklet

If you do not have your local health department phone number, call your city or town hall to find out how to reach them.

## Be Prepared

MDPH and other agencies such as your local health department and hospitals have plans to respond to a flu pandemic. You should prepare, too. Being prepared for a pandemic will also help you be prepared for seasonal flu.

More people will get sick during a pandemic than during the regular flu season. This means that more people will need medical care. During a pandemic, it may be hard to reach your doctor on the phone or to arrange an office visit. Doctors' offices, hospitals, and emergency rooms may be more crowded than usual.

For these reasons, it is important to be ready to take care of people with milder cases of the flu at home. Talk to your doctor about how you can be prepared if you or a family member gets the flu. Talk to your family about the flu so they understand how to prevent and treat it. Prepare your home with the supplies suggested in this booklet. Keep this booklet on hand in case you need it later. Develop a plan so you and your family are prepared.

To learn more on how to make a family plan, go to [www.mass.gov/samh](http://www.mass.gov/samh) or call MassSupport at **866-237-8274**.

# Reduce the Risk, Reduce the Spread

## How is the Flu Spread?

The flu spreads mostly through droplets (like spit and mucus) from the mouth, nose, and throat. This happens when a person with the flu coughs or sneezes near another person (within 3-6 feet). Sometimes people become infected by touching something like a doorknob or telephone that has been touched by someone with the flu, and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes.

People who have the flu can spread it to other people 1 day before they become sick and up to 3–5 days after they feel symptoms. Children with the flu can spread it to others for up to 7 days after they become sick.

### **IF A PANDEMIC OCCURS**

Preventing the spread of pandemic flu is **very similar** to preventing the spread of seasonal flu. During a pandemic, follow the suggestions in this booklet. Health officials may also suggest other ways of preventing the spread of flu. “Social distancing” and “community containment” are ways of not having as much contact with people with the flu. They might include closing schools and cancelling public gatherings. You may be told to avoid crowds and to work from home when possible.

## *How can I prevent getting the flu?*

Take the following steps to help prevent getting the flu or spreading it to others. These are good habits to have whether or not people around you are sick.

## 1. Get the flu vaccine

The best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated each year. See page 9 for more information about flu vaccine.

## 2. Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze

- Use a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue away right after you use it.
- Clean your hands after you cough or sneeze. Use soap and warm water. If they are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (such as Purell® or a store brand).
- Cough or sneeze into your sleeve, not your hands, if you don't have a tissue.

### HOW TO WASH HANDS WITH SOAP AND WATER

- Wet your hands with warm water and put soap on them.
- Rub your hands together to make a lather. Scrub all parts of your hands.
- Continue rubbing your hands for 15–20 seconds.
- Rinse your hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands with a towel or paper towel. Throw used paper towels away right after use.

Someone who is sick should use a separate towel or paper towel to dry off.

In public restrooms, dry your hands using a paper towel or air dryer. If possible, use a paper towel to turn off the water so your clean hands do not touch the faucet.

### HOW TO USE AN ALCOHOL-BASED HAND SANITIZER

- Put the sanitizer on the palm of one hand.
  - Rub it over all surfaces of your hands and fingers until dry.
- ! Young children should be supervised when using alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Also, store hand sanitizer out of children's reach. The alcohol it contains may be dangerous if swallowed.



### 3. *Wash your hands*

- Handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of germs.
- Wash your hands often during the day, but especially before preparing or eating food, after going to the bathroom or changing a diaper, and before and after taking care of someone who is sick.
- Make sure that your children know how to wash their hands the right way. Teach them to sing “Happy Birthday” twice to make sure they spend enough time when they wash their hands.



### 4. *Limit contact with others*

- Stay at home if you are sick.
- Do not allow visitors while people in your home are sick.
- The person with the flu should stay in a separate room if possible and limit contact with others for about 5-7 days.
- Do not share food, eating utensils, or drinks.

### 5. *Clean your home*

- Clean dishes and laundry with hot water and soap. Use a dishwasher if one is available.
- Clean surfaces touched by a person who is sick with a household disinfectant, like Lysol<sup>®</sup>, Clorox Clean Up<sup>®</sup>, or a store brand. Clean surfaces such as tabletops, telephones, nightstands, remote controls, countertops, doorknobs, and kitchen and bathroom cabinet knobs.



## CLEANING WITH BLEACH

You can use a bleach solution to clean your home. A bleach solution is 1/3 cup of bleach mixed with one gallon of water. To use bleach safely:

- Keep it out of the reach of children.
- Never mix bleach with ammonia or other household cleaners.
- Open windows and doors to provide fresh air.
- Wear latex or plastic gloves and protective eye wear.
- Always follow the manufacturer's directions when using bleach or any other cleaning product.

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### *Do I need to wear gloves when caring for someone with the flu?*

If disposable gloves are available, you may want to use them when you touch body fluids (blood, spit, and waste) of a person who is sick. Remember, gloves do not replace handwashing. Throw gloves away right after using them and wash your hands. Never wash or reuse disposable gloves.

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### *Do I need to wear a facemask when caring for someone with the flu?*

- **During the annual flu season**, most healthy people do not need facemasks (which cover the nose and mouth).
- **During the annual flu season or a pandemic**, people with flu-like symptoms (fever and cough) should put on a facemask and wash their hands before having close contact with an infant, the elderly, or people who have serious illnesses. They should do this for 5-7 days after their flu symptoms start. This is especially important for women who are breastfeeding infants.

! **If you choose to use a facemask**, there are important things you should know.

- People with certain health problems may not be able to comfortably use facemasks.
- A mask must be worn properly. It is also important to put it on, take it off, and dispose of it correctly.
- Wash your hands after handling or removing a mask because it may have the influenza virus on it.
- Even if you use a facemask, you cannot rely on it alone to prevent the flu. You must continue to wash your hands often, cover your cough, and avoid close contact and crowds.

#### **FACEMASKS DURING A PANDEMIC**

If a pandemic occurs, it is important to listen to information from health officials about the use of facemasks and respirators (masks that cover the nose and mouth and filter the air you breathe). Recommendations may change based on the virus and what is happening in the community. Check with your local health department, on the Internet at [www.mass.gov/dph/flu](http://www.mass.gov/dph/flu), or call MDPH at **617-983-6800** for more information.

## **Flu Vaccines and Other Medicines**

### ***What are flu vaccines?***

A vaccine helps your body to protect itself against a disease. There are two types of vaccines for seasonal flu: the flu shot (given with a needle injection, usually in the arm) and the nasal-spray flu vaccine (given as a spray that is inhaled through the nose).

Vaccines are the best way to protect yourself against seasonal flu. Getting a flu vaccine will not give you the flu or any other type of illness. To find out how





to get the seasonal flu vaccine, contact a doctor or your local health department. You can also visit [flu.masspro.org](http://flu.masspro.org) or call 866-627-7968 to find a public flu clinic near you. (Do not type in “www” when entering the web address.)

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### *Who should get the seasonal flu vaccine?*

Most adults and children, except infants younger than six months old, should get vaccinated to reduce their chances of getting the flu. For some people, it is especially important to get the flu vaccine every year:

- People who are at high risk of serious flu complications (such as the elderly, young children, people with chronic illnesses, or pregnant women), and
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for serious complications.

### **VACCINES DURING A PANDEMIC**

The vaccine for seasonal flu does not provide protection against pandemic flu. Pandemic flu is a new form of the flu. It will take time to make a vaccine that protects against the new virus. People will get the vaccine in stages set by public health authorities when it becomes available.

During a pandemic, MDPH and your local health department will give information about vaccines on TV and the radio, in local newspapers, and on websites. For the most current information, visit [www.mass.gov/dph/flu](http://www.mass.gov/dph/flu).

Whether or not flu vaccine is available, you can use the many other important ways to avoid the flu that are described in this booklet.

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## ***What are antiviral medicines?***

Antiviral medicines are sometimes used to treat the flu. They can shorten the time that people are sick by 1 or 2 days. They also may make people less likely to spread the flu to others. However, antivirals must be taken within 2 days after someone becomes sick in order for the medicine to work. Antivirals must be prescribed by a doctor.

Most healthy people do not need antivirals for seasonal flu. Antivirals may be best for people who are at high risk of serious complications from the flu. Check with a doctor if you have questions about whether you or your family members need antivirals.

### **ANTIVIRALS DURING A PANDEMIC**

Recommendations may change during a pandemic. MDPH will provide the latest information about use of antivirals and who should use them.

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## ***Are other vaccines available?***

Pneumonia is a serious complication of the flu. The best way to prevent one common kind of pneumonia is to be vaccinated against it. The vaccine is called pneumococcal vaccine. People who should get this vaccine include:

- Children ages 2-24 months old
- Adults age 65 years and older
- People ages 2-64 years old who:
  - Have serious long-term health problems
  - Have weakened immune systems

Talk with a doctor about whether you or your family members should get pneumococcal vaccine.

# What to Look For, What to Do

Most people who get the flu have a sudden onset of fever, dry cough, body aches, sore throat, headache, and extreme tiredness or weakness. The fever and body aches usually last 2–3 days and rarely more than 5 days. Cough, tiredness, and weakness may last longer. Some people who get the flu may feel tired or weak for 2 or more weeks after the fever goes away.

This section provides more information on flu symptoms, how to take care of a family member with the flu, and how to know when to get medical advice or medical care.

## **IF A PANDEMIC OCCURS**

The care you provide for someone who is sick with pandemic flu is the same as when someone is sick with seasonal flu.

## **Treating People with a Fever**

Fever is a higher than normal body temperature. It is the most common symptom of the flu. Although fever may cause people to worry, it helps the body fight infection and is usually not harmful.

A person with the flu often has a temperature that increases quickly, rising to a peak of 101°–104°F within 12–24 hours. Fever may come and go, especially if medicines are used to treat it. Fever from the flu typically lasts 3–5 days.

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### ***When and how to treat fever***

Anyone older than age 6 months who has a temperature below 101°F probably does not need to be treated for fever, unless he or she is uncomfortable. Here are some things you can do to keep a person with fever comfortable:



- Keep the room comfortably cool.
- Make sure the person is wearing light-weight clothing.
- Encourage the person to drink fluids, such as water or diluted fruit juices. See page 19 for more on how to make sure he or she is drinking enough.
- Consider sponging the person with lukewarm water if he or she:
  - Has a temperature above 104°F
  - Is vomiting and unable to take medicine
  - Has had a seizure caused by fever in the past

❗ Do not use cold water, which can cause shivering and make the fever worse.

❗ Do not use rubbing alcohol to try to bring down someone's temperature. Alcohol can be absorbed through the skin and cause health problems, especially for children.

Fever-reducing medicines can be used if the person is uncomfortable. Use medicine that is right for the person's age and follow label directions carefully. These medicines are safe and effective if given correctly:

- Acetaminophen, such as Tylenol® or a store brand
- Ibuprofen, such as Advil®, Motrin®, or a store brand
- Aspirin, such as Bayer® or a store brand, for adults only

❗ Never give aspirin to someone younger than 19 years old unless recommended by a doctor.

❗ Keep all medicines out of the reach of children.

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## How to take a temperature

There are different ways to take a temperature depending on the age of the person who is sick.

- Newborn to 3 years old: Take a temperature with a rectal thermometer (by bottom).
- 3 - 5 years old: Take a rectal, ear, or armpit temperature.
- 5 years and older: Take an oral temperature (by mouth) for the most accurate reading. A temperature can also be taken by armpit or by ear.

Whenever you take someone's temperature, it is important to remember the following:

- Always clean a thermometer with soap and water before and after each use.
  - Every time you take a temperature, write down the time, temperature reading, where you took the temperature from, and the type and amount of medicine given (if any).
  - If the person who is sick has been using medicine to bring down the fever, take his or her temperature before the next dose is due.
  - The length of time to measure a temperature depends on the type of thermometer you use. Read the manufacturer's instructions for details.
- ! Never leave a person alone while the temperature is being taken.
- ! Do not use mercury thermometers. If you have a mercury thermometer, contact your local health department to learn how to safely dispose of it.

### NORMAL TEMPERATURE RANGES

- Rectum (bottom): 97.9° – 100.3°F
- Ear: 96.4° – 100.4°F
- Mouth: 95.9° – 99.5°F
- Armpit: 94.5° – 99.1°F

HOW TO TAKE A TEMPERATURE: From: *Parenting Corner Q&A: Fever*.  
Retrieved October 10, 2007, from American Academy of Pediatrics Web site:  
[http://www.aap.org/publiced/BR\\_Fever.htm](http://www.aap.org/publiced/BR_Fever.htm)



For some elderly people, a “normal temperature” may be different than for others. The elderly may regularly take medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen, or acetaminophen, which can lower body temperature. There are two ways you can decide what a fever is for an elderly person:

- A rise of 2°F or more over the “normal temperature” for the person.
- An oral temperature of more than 99°F.

### *Rectal temperature (by bottom)*

1. Put a small amount of lubricant, such as Vaseline<sup>®</sup>, on the end of a digital rectal thermometer.
2. Place the child on his or her belly across your lap or on a firm surface. Hold the child by placing your hand on his or her lower back, just above the child’s bottom.
3. With your other hand, put the thermometer about one half to one inch into the anal opening. Do not insert the thermometer any further. Hold the thermometer in place loosely with two fingers, keeping your hand cupped around the child’s bottom.
4. Hold the thermometer in place for the amount of time in the manufacturer’s directions or until you hear a beep.

### *Ear temperature*

1. Use a thermometer made specifically for use in the ear.
2. Gently pull the top part of the ear back and up. This will straighten the ear canal and make it easier to put the thermometer in correctly.
3. Gently put the ear thermometer into the ear canal until it is snugly inside.
4. Hold the button down for the amount of time written in the manufacturer’s directions.



### Oral temperature (by mouth)

1. Do not let the person drink any liquid for at least 15 minutes before taking the temperature.
2. Place the thermometer under the person's tongue towards the back of the mouth. Ask the person to close his or her mouth and not bite down on the thermometer.
3. Hold the thermometer for the amount of time written in the manufacturer's directions.

### Armpit temperature

1. Place the end of an oral or rectal digital thermometer in the person's armpit.
2. Hold his or her arm tightly against the chest for about 1 minute, or until you hear the "beep."

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### When to call a doctor

Get emergency medical care if someone has difficulty breathing, chest pain, severe or continued vomiting, or is confused or unaware of his or her surroundings.

### Children younger than 5 years old

Age	Call a doctor if your child has a temperature of...
Younger than 3 months old	100.4°F or higher, even if she or he seems otherwise completely healthy
Between 3 months and 2 years old	102°F or higher, even if she or he seems otherwise completely healthy
Between 2 and 5 years old	102°F or higher or If the fever lasts more than 3 days, or you are concerned about how the child is acting

## *Children age 5 years and older and adults*

Call a doctor if the person who has the fever has any of the following symptoms:

- Fever of 104°F or higher that does not go down within 2 hours of home treatment
- Any fever that lasts more than 3 days
- Is not drinking fluids or is unable to hold them down
- Major changes in mood and awareness
- Seizures (uncontrolled twitching, shaking, or convulsions)
- Symptoms that improve for 24 hours and then worsen, with more fever and cough
- Still “acts sick” after the fever is brought down
- Unusual eye sensitivity to bright light
- Stiff neck or pain when bending his or her head forward
- Severe headache
- Unusual skin rash
- Severe swelling in the throat
- Not feeling better in 3–5 days
- Any other unusual symptoms or concerns
- Any worsening of an existing chronic illness

## **Treating People with a Cough**

A “dry” cough is a cough that does not bring up mucus. It is a common symptom of the flu.

### *Drink lots of fluids*

Clear fluids (such as water or clear broth), juice, non-caffeinated tea, and warm soup are all good choices for relieving cough. Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and cigarette smoke, which can make symptoms worse.



## COUGH MEDICINE

Over the counter cough and cold medicines may relieve cough and other symptoms, but they do not treat the virus that is causing it. Cold and cough medicines have potential for causing serious side effects in children. Do not give cough or cold medicine to children under 2 years old.

People with high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart disease may also have serious side effects from these medications. For children between 2 and 6 years old, older children, and adults, follow the package instructions carefully. If you have any questions, talk with your doctor.

### *Get rest*

People should stay home from work if they have a bad cough or feel drowsy from cough medicines. This will give them a chance to rest. It will also reduce the chance that they will spread illness to others.

### *Adjust the room's temperature and humidity*

Keep the room temperature comfortable. If the air is dry, a clean cool-mist humidifier or vaporizer may be helpful.

### *Soothe the throat*

Gargling with warm salt water several times a day (1/2 teaspoon of salt mixed in an 8 ounce glass of water), drinking warm lemon water with honey, or using throat lozenges may help soothe a sore throat and relieve a cough.

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## **When to call a doctor**

Get **emergency** medical care if someone is having difficulty breathing or has chest pain.

### *Adults and older children*

Most coughs get better in a week or two. However, call a doctor immediately if the person who is sick has any of these symptoms:

- Pain in the chest, especially when coughing or taking a deep breath
- Problems breathing, shortness of breath, or difficulty getting enough air when at rest
- Green, rust colored, or bloody mucus that comes up with cough
- Cough that lasts more than 7–10 days

### *Infants*

Call a doctor if an infant:

- Has a cough that lasts more than 1 week
- Has problems breathing
- Loses his or her appetite and refuses feedings
- Vomits frequently with coughing spells
- Seems very irritable
- Seems unusually sleepy or is hard to wake up

## **Getting Enough to Drink**

When people lose more water than they take in, they become dehydrated. Infants and children can become dehydrated more easily than adults because of their smaller size. The elderly and people with some illnesses are also at higher risk.

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### *Signs of mild or moderate dehydration*

- Feeling more thirsty
- Very dry mouth
- Less urination or darker urine
- Slight dizziness or lightheadedness
- Headache

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### *Additional signs of dehydration in babies and children*

- Being less active
- Fewer tears when crying



- Slightly sunken soft spot on top of a baby's head
- Fewer wet diapers than a child normally has, or the weight of wet diapers is less than normal for him or her

**Severe dehydration (not having enough fluid in the body) is a medical emergency.** A person with severe dehydration may need fluids intravenously (through a needle in the arm) in a clinic or hospital. While you are waiting for medical help, continue to offer the person small amounts of fluids often.

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### ***How to prevent and treat dehydration***

The person who is sick should drink plenty of water, fruit and vegetable juices, soups and broths, and beverages such as Gatorade® or a store brand (for adults) and Pedialyte® or a store brand (for children). Avoid caffeine and alcohol.

Encourage someone who is sick to drink small amounts of fluids often. Keep an eye on the person who is sick, since dehydration can occur very quickly, especially in young children. Flu does not usually cause diarrhea in adults, but sometimes can in children. People with diarrhea need fluids that contain the right amount of salt and sugar. Infants or toddlers who breastfeed should continue to do so. For children who are not breastfeeding, Pedialyte®, Ceralyte®, and Oralyte® all contain the right amount of salt and sugar. These are the best fluids to give to children with diarrhea.

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### ***+* When to call a doctor**

Get **emergency** medical care if the person who is sick has any of these symptoms.

- Difficulty breathing
- Extreme fussiness or sleepiness (in infants and children)

- Extreme irritability, decreased alertness, speech changes, confusion, or unconsciousness (in adults and children)
- Muscle weakness and fast heart rate

Call your doctor immediately if the person who is sick has:

- Extreme thirst
- Very dry mouth or inside of nose, or skin does not bounce back to normal if it is gently pinched
- Little or no urination
- Weight loss
- Fast heart rate
- Very low activity level
- Deeply sunken soft spot on top of a baby's head

Watch the person who is sick carefully for signs that dehydration is getting worse. Call your doctor if there are any unusual symptoms that concern you.



## Making People with the Flu Comfortable

It is normal for people with the flu to have body aches, headaches, a sore throat, a stuffy nose, and to feel weak and tired.

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### *Body aches and other discomfort*

Help a family member who is sick to change positions in bed when awake. People who can get out of bed should take a short walk around their room two or three times each day.

Medicines like acetaminophen (such as Tylenol® or a store brand) and ibuprofen (such as Advil®, Motrin®, or a store brand) can relieve the headache or body aches associated with the flu. Aspirin (such as Bayer® or a store

brand) can be taken by adults. Use medicine that is right for the person's age and follow label directions carefully.

Provide a quiet, soothing atmosphere so the person who is sick can rest and relax. He or she may have shaking chills at times, and other times feel very warm. Keep light blankets available so they can be taken off or added as needed. Dress young children in loose fitting, comfortable pajamas that can be layered for more or less warmth.

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### ***Nasal congestion (stuffy nose)***

A stuffy nose is sometimes a symptom of the flu. There also may be clear, watery mucus coming from the nose (a runny nose). However, a stuffy or runny nose is more common with colds and allergies than the flu.

### ***Ways to help nasal congestion***

- Drink plenty of water, juice, tea, or soup. See page 19 for more information on drinking enough fluids.
- Use a clean cool-mist humidifier or steam from a hot shower or bath to help keep the nose and throat moist.
- Use breathing strips, which are sold at most drugstores, to help the person who is sick breathe through the nose more freely. Follow the package directions carefully. Breathing strips are not recommended for children younger than 5 years old.
- Use saline sprays or saltwater rinses for older children and adults.
- Have the person sit up or keep his or her head raised. Crib mattresses and childrens' beds can be slightly raised by placing books under the legs at the head of the bed.
- Make sure no one smokes in the house when someone is sick.

If an infant with a stuffy nose is having trouble nursing or taking a bottle, you can try to clear his or her nose with a rubber bulb syringe before each feeding. For thick mucus a doctor may recommend using saline nose drops.



### USING A BULB SYRINGE

- Squeeze the bulb part of the syringe first.
- Gently insert the rubber tip into one nostril.
- Slowly release the bulb.
- Clean after each use.



### *Medicine for a stuffy nose*

- Decongestants such as Sudafed<sup>®</sup> or Contac<sup>®</sup> may help relieve stuffiness for adults. Children should not be given decongestants. They do not work for children, and can have serious side effects.
- Antihistamines such as Benadryl<sup>®</sup> or Claritin<sup>®</sup> can reduce the amount of mucus for adults. Do not use antihistamines for children unless a doctor recommends them.

Allergy and cold medicines contain many ingredients and may not help very much. They can also be dangerous for young children. Always follow package directions carefully. If you have any questions, talk with your doctor.

### **+** *When to call a doctor*

#### *Children*

Call a doctor if children have any of these symptoms:

- Difficulty nursing, taking a bottle, or drinking.
- Difficulty breathing. Breathing may become faster than normal. The child may appear to be working hard to breathe. A toddler or young child may squat down and lean forward slightly to make breathing easier.
- Behavior changes such as increased restlessness, anxiety, and irritability. As breathing becomes more difficult a child may get sleepy, with periods of feeling agitated.
- Color changes of the skin.

## *Adolescents or adults*

Call a doctor if the person who is sick has any of the these symptoms:

- Painful redness or swelling around the eyes or nose
- Vision problems
- Sinus pain or severe headache
- Symptoms lasting longer than 7–10 days
- Any breathing problems
- Extreme agitation
- Mucus that becomes thick or changes color
- Limited activities for longer than 2 weeks
- Sudden and severe weakness or fatigue
- Sudden unplanned weight loss
- Confusion or decreased alertness

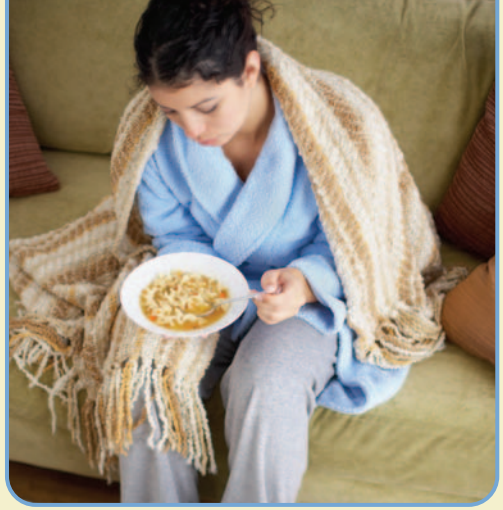
## **Nutrition and the Flu**

It is important to have a healthy diet at all times, but especially during flu season. If you are healthy, you will be better able to fight the flu.

To stay healthy, eat foods from each of these food groups every day:

- Grains (such as bread, rice, and oatmeal)
- Vegetables (such as lettuce, spinach, carrots, corn, potatoes, green beans, and tomatoes)
- Fruits (such as apples, oranges, berries, grapes, melons, and bananas)
- Dairy (such as low-fat or fat-free milk, cheese, and yogurt)
- Meat and beans (such as lean beef, chicken, turkey, pork, eggs, fish, and beans)

Go to **[www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)** on the Internet for more detailed information on healthy eating. If a family member has special health care needs or food requirements, ask his or her doctor about what foods are best.



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### ***Suggested fluids for the flu***

- Water
- Warm broth (with low salt)
- Chicken soup
- Real fruit juices (with no added sugar) such as apple juice and orange juice
- Vegetable juices
- Non-caffeinated teas
- Hot water mixed with lemon and honey
- Frozen ice pops or Jello® for children who refuse liquids

Be sure to increase fluid intake, unless the doctor advises you otherwise.

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### ***Suggested foods for the flu***

If someone feels very sick, provide easily digested soft foods. He or she should eat often and in small amounts. Foods such as oatmeal, toast, applesauce, or rice work well.

# Prepare Yourself, Prepare Your Home

## PREPARING FOR PANDEMIC FLU

You can prepare for a flu pandemic now. Because many people will be sick at the same time during a pandemic, stores may be closed or low on some supplies. Keep extra supplies on hand before a pandemic happens. This is also useful in case of other emergencies, such as blizzards and hurricanes, and will also help prepare your home for seasonal flu.

## Supply List

Keep the following supplies in your home. They are useful when caring for someone with the flu. Many of these supplies can be found at the supermarket, convenience store, or drugstore.

- Soap for washing hands
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer such as Purell® or a store brand for cleaning hands
- Medicines
  - Acetaminophen (such as Tylenol® or a store brand) or ibuprofen (such as Advil®, Motrin®, or a store brand)
  - Aspirin (such as Bayer® or a store brand) for people age 19 years and older
  - Cough and cold medicine (for children age 6 years and older and adults)
  - Throat lozenges
  - A medicine measuring spoon or medicine dropper to make it easy to give the right dose of liquid medicine, especially for children. Ordinary spoons should not be used because they do not measure accurately.
- !** Check the expiration dates on medicines in your home regularly. Throw away any that have expired.



- ❑ Thermometer(s) for checking body temperature
  - You may need different types of thermometers depending on the ages of the people in your home.
- ❑ Fluids like water, fruit and vegetable juices, soups and broths, and beverages such as Gatorade® or a store brand (for adults) and Pedialyte® or a store brand (for children)
- ❑ Foods that are easy to digest (such as oatmeal, applesauce, and rice)
- ❑ Household disinfectant to clean surfaces
- ❑ Paper towels for cleaning and handwashing
- ❑ Trash bags to line waste baskets
- ❑ Note pads and pens or pencils
- ❑ An extra supply of special foods, medicine, or equipment that are needed by you or family members due to any chronic illnesses

## Care for the Caregiver

When you are caring for a family member who is sick, you may feel worried or afraid. Your daily routines may be interrupted. You may have changes in sleep and appetite, be more forgetful, have less interest in regular activities, and feel more irritable and impatient.

To maintain your strength and ability to take care of others, it is important to:

- Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet, including plenty of fluids.
- Avoid drug and alcohol use, which can make you less alert.
- Breathe slowly and deeply if you are feeling anxious.
- Take a break if possible.
- Stay in the present. Focus on simple and manageable tasks.
- Follow the steps to prevent illness described in this booklet, including good handwashing and covering your cough.
- Get rest. If possible, use backup caregivers so you can have some time to rest without interruption. Make a plan for backup caregivers ahead of time.
- Try to make time for light exercise, such as taking a walk.
- Encourage healthy behaviors in other people who live in your home.
- Pace yourself. It may take some time for the person who is sick to get better.
- Keep notes about the symptoms of the person who is sick so you will have them ready if you need to talk to a doctor.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Have reasonable expectations of yourself. You can't do everything all at once.



### **PLAN AHEAD TO REDUCE STRESS**

Planning for additional help is one way you can reduce stress. Arrange for one or more people who can help care for a family member if you become too tired, or you get sick yourself. If a family member has special health care needs, teach your backup caregivers what these needs are and how to meet them.

A friend, family member, or neighbor that you can share your feelings with or look to for advice may also help you deal with stress. Don't wait for a family member to get sick. Plan ahead.

Despite their best efforts, some caregivers have stronger reactions to stress at times. These may include:

- Pounding or racing heart
- Shortness of breath or tightness in the chest
- Feeling dizzy or faint
- Chills or hot flashes
- Fear of losing control or “going crazy”
- Trembling, shaking, or sweating
- Feelings of choking or smothering
- Nausea or stomach ache
- Numbness or tingling sensations
- Feeling that things are unreal
- Trouble sleeping

Some of these feelings are similar to symptoms of the flu. Keep in mind the differences between these feelings and flu symptoms (fever, cough, muscle aches, and tiredness). It is always important to check with a doctor about any unusual symptoms.

## **IF A PANDEMIC OCCURS**

A flu pandemic can be stressful. For most people, feelings of stress go away soon after a stressful time ends. Sometimes people still feel stressed long after it is over. These are all normal responses.

If you have feelings that make it difficult to function normally, talk to your doctor or call the MassSupport Helpline at **866-237-8274 / TTY 617-536-5872**.

## **Should I Call a Doctor?**

**+** If you are having a medical emergency you should call 911 immediately.

Check the sections on Fever, Cough, Getting Enough to Drink, and Making People with the Flu Comfortable to see when you should call a doctor about these issues.

You may need to contact a doctor for the reasons described throughout this booklet, or for other reasons of concern to you. You should always call before going to the office. Before calling a doctor, except in an emergency, fill out the form on the next page and make a list of the questions you have. Having this information will help the doctor give the right advice.

## **HOSPITAL CARE DURING A PANDEMIC**

During a severe pandemic, hospitals may become overcrowded and need all their space to care for patients who are the most sick. Special clinics may be set up in community locations, such as school buildings, to care for people with the flu and other illnesses. People will be encouraged to care for themselves, their family members, and neighbors at home whenever possible. Avoiding crowded places, such as emergency and waiting rooms, is one way people can protect themselves from the flu during a pandemic.



# Information Summary for the Doctor



1. Main reason you are calling

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2. Age

3. Temperature

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4. Main symptoms

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5. How long has the person been feeling sick?

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6. Any breathing problems?  Yes  No  Fast breathing  Shortness of breath

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7. Vomiting?  Yes  No If yes, how long?

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8. Drinking fluids?  Yes  No If not, for how long?

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9. Eating normally?  Yes  No

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10. Sleeping normally?  Yes  No

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11. What have you done to treat the illness?

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12. Has the person traveled in the last week to ten days?  Yes  No

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Where?

When?

With whom?

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13. List chronic illnesses or medical conditions:

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14. Pregnant?

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15. List medicines for other illnesses or conditions:

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16. Anyone else in the family sick?  Yes  No

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Who?

How long?

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What symptoms?

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# My Flu Care Information



Keep important contact information here so it will be easy to access in case you or other family members become sick. Be sure to keep this information up to date. Use more pages if needed.

a. Doctor(s) phone number(s):

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b. Pharmacy phone number:

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c. Emergency medical phone number:

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d. Local health department phone number:

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e. Backup caregiver(s) phone number(s):

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f. Medicines that you or family members take regularly:

Name	Medicine	Dose



**g. Allergies that you or family members have:**

Name	Allergies

**h. Special diets that you or family members follow:**

Name	Special diets

## Flu Care Resources

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Flu Vaccination Clinics in Massachusetts	866-627-7968 <a href="http://flu.masspro.org">flu.masspro.org</a> (Do not type "www")
Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH)	888-658-2850 617-983-6800
MDPH Flu Website	<a href="http://www.mass.gov/dph/flu">www.mass.gov/dph/flu</a>
US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Flu Website	<a href="http://www.cdc.gov/flu">www.cdc.gov/flu</a>
US Department of Health and Human Services Pandemic Flu Website	<a href="http://www.pandemicflu.gov">www.pandemicflu.gov</a>
USDA Food Pyramid	<a href="http://www.mypyramid.gov">www.mypyramid.gov</a>

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