American Red Cross

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Home Care for Pandemic Flu

What is Pandemic Flu?

A "pandemic" is a disease that spreads all over the world and affects a large number of people. If you are caring for a loved one during a pandemic, it's important to take steps to protect yourself and others. Always follow the most current advice of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and your local health department.

Prevent the Spread of Pandemic 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 afterward. Put used tissues in a wastebasket.
- 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 prevent germs from entering your body.

Also, a person with signs of the flu 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.

When a Household Member Is Sick

The flu virus is spread when contaminated droplets exit the mouth and nose of an infected person and the virus comes in contact with others. So, follow these tips to protect yourself and others in your home:

- Keep everyone's personal items separate. All household members should avoid sharing computers, pens, papers, clothes, towels, sheets, blankets, food or eating utensils.
- Disinfect door knobs, switches, handles, toys and other surfaces that are commonly touched around the home or workplace.

Disinfectant:
1 gallon water
¼ cup bleach
Mix up a fresh batch every time you use it.

- It is okay to wash everyone's dishes and clothes together. Use detergent and very hot water. Wash your hands after handling dirty laundry.
- Wear disposable gloves when in contact with or cleaning up body fluids.
- One person should be the caregiver. He or she may benefit by wearing a mask when giving care.

Practice Hand Hygiene

Caregivers should always wash their hands before providing care. Afterward, wash again and apply alcohol-based hand sanitizer as well. 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 15 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 and use it to turn off the faucet. A shared towel will spread germs.

Recognize Pandemic Flu Symptoms

Watch for these symptoms:

- Fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Muscle pain

Call your health-care professional at the first sign of the flu. Many symptoms can be treated by the health-care professional over the telephone.

Care for a Loved One with the Flu

A person recovering from flu should have:

- Rest and plenty of liquids
- No alcohol or tobacco
- Medications to relieve flu symptoms

In some cases, a health-care professional may prescribe antiviral drugs to treat the flu. Antibiotics (like penicillin) don't cure it.

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Monitor Pandemic Flu Symptoms

Keep a care log. Write down the date, time, fever, symptoms, medicines given and dosage. Make a new entry at least every 4 hours or when the symptoms change. Call your healthcare professional again if your loved one has:

- A high fever
  - Children and Adults: Greater than 105°F (40.5°C)
  - Babies 3- to 24-months-old: 103°F (39.4°C) or higher.
  - Babies up to 3 months: Rectal temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher.
- Shaking chills
- Coughing that produces thick mucus
- Dehydration (feeling of dry mouth or excessive thirst)
- Worsening of an existing serious medical condition (for example: heart or lung disease, diabetes, HIV, cancer)

If you cannot reach your health-care professional, **call 9-1-1** or local emergency number for any of the signs below:

- Irritability and/or confusion
- Difficult breathing or chest pain with each breath
- Bluish skin
- Stiff neck
- Inability to move an arm or leg
- First-time seizure

Prevent Dehydration

Dehydration occurs when the body loses too much water and it's not replaced quickly enough. It can be serious. Begin giving soothing drinks at the first signs of the flu and follow these tips:

- In addition to plenty of liquids, give ice and light, easily digested foods, such as soup and broth.
- If your loved one has diarrhea or vomiting, give fluids that contain electrolytes. These are available at your pharmacy or grocery store. Or you can make your own rehydration electrolyte drink for someone over the age of 12.

Electrolyte Drink:
1 quart water
½ tsp. baking soda
½ tsp. table salt
3 to 4 tbsp. sugar
¼ tsp. salt substitute
Mix well and flavor with lemon juice or sugar-free Kool-Aid®.

- If drinking liquids makes nausea worse, give one sip at a time until your loved one can drink again.

Reduce Fever

To help reduce a fever, do the following:

- Give plenty of fluids.
- 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 relieve discomfort, give a sponge bath with lukewarm water.

After you have called your doctor or emergency number for a fever, continue to follow the home treatment recommendations above. If there is a delay in getting help, ask a health-care professional if you should start an additional dose of an alternate fever-reducing medication (acetaminophen, ibuprophen or aspirin) between the doses described on the label. Always continue to give plenty of fluids.

Prepare for a Flu Pandemic

Make a plan now for a flu pandemic. Figure out what you will do if members of your household have to stay home from work or school or stay separated from others for a period of time. Keep extra supplies of food, water, medications and your disaster supply kit on hand.

Pandemic Flu Caregiving Supplies:

- Thermometer
- Soap
- Box of disposable gloves
- Acetaminophen
- Ibuprophen
- Bleach
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Paper towels
- Tissues
- Surgical masks (one for each person)
- Sugar, baking soda, salt, salt substitute

For more information, contact your local American Red Cross chapter, visit www.redcross.org or call 1-800-RED-CROSS.

Many of the recommendations in this brochure are from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care or current public health advice. Seek advice from your health-care provider, the CDC and your local health department. Visit www.pandemicflu.gov.

As with all medications and treatments, there are side effects and potential complications. Seek professional advice from your health-care professional to make sure any medication or vaccination is appropriate to your health.

READY IN 3 — THREE STEPS TO PREPARE FOR AN EMERGENCY

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