



Influenza

www.flu.oregon.gov

Talking to children during a flu pandemic

Introduction

- It can be hard for children to understand stressful situations such as a flu pandemic. Children who have witnessed serious illness or death, either directly or through the news media, are likely to have an increased sense of vulnerability, fear and anxiety. Stressful situations can cause children to worry and have many questions about what is happening and how it can be fixed.
- If you cope well with a stressful situation, your children will also. Your calm support and guidance will ease your children's worries and help them feel safe and secure.



What you can do to help

Recent research on this topic suggests that parents and teachers should talk with children about the event, but not force the issue:

- Ask what they know or have heard about pandemic flu.
- Encourage them to ask questions and provide honest and simple explanations that match their level of anxiety and ability to understand.
- Limit the amount of television viewing and exposure to adult conversations about the pandemic by younger children.

- When older children watch television coverage of the pandemic, watch with them and discuss what's happening and how they feel about it.
- Allow children to express their feelings and concerns. Consider sharing your own feelings and take the opportunity to model good coping behaviors.
- Provide reassurance about the steps being taken to keep children safe.
- Keep activities as normal as possible, even if your routine changes (i.e. due to day care or school closure)
- If children are afraid or uncertain, they may need more affection and attention.
- Encourage children to wash their hands, cover their mouths when they sneeze or cough, and not share food or drinks. This guidance gives them a greater sense of control over the flu and will help to reduce their anxiety.



Signs that signal children are having difficulty coping

- Children may exhibit a variety of symptoms that signal that they may be having difficulty coping. Parents, teachers and caregivers

should watch for any unusual behaviors, such as:

- Clinginess or neediness, separation anxiety, irritability, jumpiness, sadness, worry, listlessness
- Poor concentration, exaggeration, blaming, limited attention span, obsessive play
- Lack of interest in previously enjoyed activities, depression, social withdrawal, trouble getting along with others, resistance, defiance, or other behavioral problems
- Physical symptoms, such as fatigue, headaches, hair loss, increased heartbeat, stomach aches, changes in appetite, nightmares, difficulty sleeping, sleeping too much, changes in school performance or changes in activity levels.

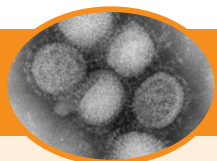


Additional resources:

American Academy of Pediatrics, June 2009, “Frequently Asked Questions and Answers for Parents and Caregivers About H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu)”.
www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/may09swinefluqanda.htm

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. June, 2009. “H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) and You”,
www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm

Children’s National Medical Center, “Talking with Children about H1N1 (Swine Flu)”
www.childrensnational.org/Pressroom/cnmc04300901.aspx



For more information

Oregon Public Health Division
www.flu.oregon.gov

Oregon Public Health Hotline
1-800-978-3040

Oregon county health departments
www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/lhd/lhd.shtml

Federal pandemic H1N1 flu information
www.flu.gov

World Health Organization:
www.who.int

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