

# Talking to Children During a Flu Pandemic

## For More Information

Public Health Hotline

1-800-978-3040

[www.flu.oregon.gov](http://www.flu.oregon.gov)

## Centers for Disease Control & Prevention:

1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)

1-888-232-6348 TTY

E-mail: [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov)

You can also visit the following Web sites for the latest information on talking to children about pandemic H1N1 flu:

## Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/talkingtokids.htm>

## National Association of School Psychologists:

<http://www.nasponline.org/resources/swineflu.aspx>

This document can be provided upon request in alternative formats for individuals with disabilities. Other formats may include (but are not limited to) large print, Braille, audio recordings, Web-based communications and other electronic formats.

Call 971-673-1244, or for TTY call 971-673-0372 to arrange for the alternative format that will work best for you.

## 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

## Local Health Departments

Baker .....	541-523-8211
Benton .....	541-766-6835
Clackamas.....	503-655-8430
Clatsop .....	503-325-8500
Columbia .....	503-397-4651
Coos.....	541-756-2020
.....	ext. 510
Crook .....	541-447-5165
Curry .....	541-247-3300
Deschutes .....	541-322-7400
Douglas .....	800-234-0985
Gilliam .....	541-384-2061
Grant .....	541-575-0429
Harney .....	541-573-2271
Hood River.....	541-386-1115
Jackson .....	541-774-8209
Jefferson.....	541-475-4456
Josephine.....	541-474-5325
Klamath .....	541-882-8846
Lake .....	541-947-6045
Lane .....	541-682-4041
Lincoln .....	541-265-4112
Linn.....	541-967-3888
Malheur .....	541-889-7279
Marion .....	503-584-4870
Morrow.....	541-676-5421
Multnomah .....	503-988-3674
Polk.....	503-623-8175
Sherman .....	541-506-2600
Tillamook.....	503-842-3900
Umatilla.....	541-278-5432
Union.....	541-962-8801
Wallowa.....	541-426-4848
Wasco.....	541-506-2600
Washington.....	503-846-3594
Wheeler.....	541-763-2725
Yamhill.....	503-434-7525

## Public Health Emergency Preparedness Program

800 NE Oregon St., Suite 465B  
Portland, OR 97232

publichealth.preparedness@state.or.us

- o Lack of interest in previously enjoyed activities, depression, social withdrawal, trouble getting along with others, resistance, defiance, or other behavioral problems
- o 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.
- If symptoms of emotional distress are severe or prolonged, contact your local health department for information on counseling services available in your area. Your child's school may also have a counselor or social worker available who can provide guidance and support for your child.

### Additional resources:

American Academy of Pediatrics, June 2009, "Frequently Asked Questions and Answers for Parents and Caregivers About H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu)".

<http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/may09swinefluqanda.htm>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. June, 2009. "H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) and You", <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/qa.htm>

Children's National Medical Center, "Talking with Children about H1N1 (Swine Flu)"

<http://www.childrensnational.org/Pressroom/cnmc04300901.aspx>