

Taking Care of a Sick Person in Your Home - Guidance for the Public During the 2009 - 2010 Influenza Season

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The following information can help you provide safer care at home for sick persons during a flu outbreak or flu pandemic.

Flu viruses are mainly spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with the flu. Germs can also be spread when a person touches something that has germs on it (e.g. a desk, phone, door knob) and then touches their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands. **When providing care to a person who is sick with the flu, be sure to protect yourself and others who are not sick by: 1) keeping the sick person away from other people as much as possible, 2) washing your hands often with soap and water and 3) following the recommendations below.**

Implement social distancing at home – Placement of the sick person

- People who have an influenza-like illness should stay at home until at least 24 hours after the fever is gone (without use of a fever reducing medicine) except to get medical care or for other necessities.
- Keep the sick person in a room separate from the common areas of the home and keep the door closed.
- Have the sick person use a separate bathroom if possible. This bathroom should be cleaned daily with a household disinfectant such as bleach.
- Have the sick person wear a facemask, if available and tolerated, when in a common area of the home.

Protect other persons in the home from becoming ill

- The sick person should not have visitors other than the caregiver. A phone call, letter, or email is safer than a visit.
- Have only one person in the home take care of the sick person if possible.
- *People at high risk of flu complications include those who are pregnant, have asthma or diabetes, have compromised immune systems, or have neuromuscular diseases.* Avoid having a person who is at high risk of flu complications be the caregiver, if possible.
- If a person with high risk of flu complications cannot avoid close contact with a sick person, consider having the high-risk person wear a facemask or respirator during contact.
- Ensure all persons in the home thoroughly wash their hands with soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently. This is especially important for the sick person after coughing and/or sneezing.
- Use paper towels for drying hands after hand washing or assign each person in the home a separate cloth towel (e.g. have different colored towels for each person).

If you are the caregiver

- Avoid close, face-to-face contact with the sick person.
- Remind the sick person to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of the elbow.
- When holding small children who are sick, place their chin on your shoulder so that they will not cough into your face.
- Clean your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after you care for the sick person or handle used tissues or dirty laundry.

Good housekeeping helps everyone

- Wash your hands after throwing away tissues and other disposable items used by the sick person in the trash.
- Keep surfaces clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant according to the directions on the product label.
- Linens, eating utensils, and dishes used by a sick person do not need to be cleaned separately, but should be washed with soap and water before being used by others in the home.
- Avoid “hugging” laundry prior to washing it to prevent contaminating yourself.
- Wash linens (such as bed sheets and towels) by using household laundry soap and tumble dry on a hot setting.
- Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub right after handling dirty laundry.

For more information on the novel H1N1 influenza and seasonal influenza, please visit www.hcphes.org, www.cdc.gov, or www.flu.gov.