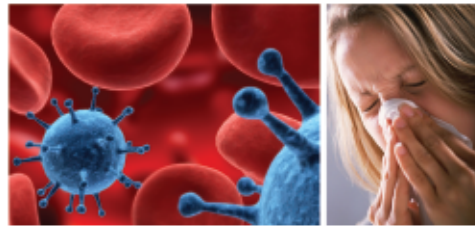


H1N1 FLU VIRUS



Dealing with stress: Information for health providers

Disasters and infectious diseases, like any life stressor, challenge the way we cope. Whether we learn about them on television or experience them personally, we can feel upset, fearful and anxious as a result, both for our own personal safety and that of our family, friends and community.

The pandemic H1N1 virus (PH1N1) (human swine flu) currently circulating is a new influenza virus that poses a risk of widespread illness and challenges all of us.

Everyone naturally becomes concerned when their health is threatened. As a health care provider you are more often in contact with people in poor health so your risk and concerns may be even greater. Feeling anxious or worried for yourself and your family is understandable.

Assessing and coping with risk as health care provider

The increase in patient load, changes to your workplace structure and routine can make you feel anxious and stressed. In addition to an increase in patients with flu-like symptoms, you may also be dealing with an increase in patients feeling anxious and fearful about getting the flu .

Keep your risk in context

Follow the health and safety guidelines of the Public Health Agency of Canada and your health care facility. In the case of any infectious disease, it is important to protect against infection by following proper hand-washing techniques (See www.who.int/gpsc/clean_hands_protection/en/index.html). Health care facilities will also have infection control policies and practices in place. Your local public health authority will provide information and the Public Health Agency of Canada is an excellent and current source of H1N1 information (www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/swine_200904-eng.php).

Keep your risk in perspective

Remember that we hear about and pay more attention to the few people who get very sick or even die from an illness than we do about the many more people who successfully recover from an illness.

Taking care of yourself under times of stress

As a health care provider, it may be easy for you to recognize when someone is not coping well psychologically. However, it is also important that you keep an eye on your own stress level and how well you are managing it.

What to watch out for

Stress will affect all people differently. We can be affected psychologically (e.g., feeling worried), as well as physically (e.g., sleeping poorly). Stressors that are beyond our personal control are especially difficult to cope with. Signs and symptoms that you may not be coping well include:

- Sleeping poorly, too much or too little
- Avoiding others
- Experiencing headaches, stomach problems, neck or back pain
- Crying
- Feeling anxious, depressed or having panic attacks
- Feeling angry, guilty, helpless, numb or confused
- Thinking about or watching too much television on H1N1 or pandemics
- Not wanting to get out of bed or leave the house
- Having difficulties concentrating
- Excessive eating
- Drinking more alcohol or taking more prescription drugs
- Having little patience
- Feeling overprotective of loved ones
- Nervous about leaving home or traveling

What can I do?

Try to keep as normal a routine as possible. Remember to eat well, get a good night's sleep and take time to relax and exercise. Avoid using alcohol or drugs to numb your concerns.

It is important to remember that most of us have had some of the signs and symptoms of distress listed above at one time or another.

We all feel stressed and overwhelmed at times and there is no shame or weakness in that. At these times, it can be very helpful to talk about your thoughts, feelings and concerns with family, friends, co-workers, teachers, spiritual advisors, health professionals or community leaders. These may be conversations you will want or need to have more than once.

It is also okay and important to take a break from the stressor and from talking about it. Remember to take time to restore by spending time with family and friends or engaging in hobbies and sports.

If you do experience a number of the signs and symptoms of distress beyond a couple of weeks, they persist to the point where you are not able to carry out your usual routines, or are accompanied by intense feelings of despair or helplessness or suicidal thoughts it is important to see a regulated health professional. These professionals include your family physician, psychologists, nurses and social workers.

Prepared by the Canadian Psychological Association, the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Psychiatric Association.

Some information adapted from the Public Health Agency of Canada brochure, *Responding to Stressful Events: Taking Care of Ourselves, Our Families and Our Communities*, Feb.2005.

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