

Coping with H1N1 Flu

We all react differently to public health events. Some Manitobans are currently concerned about the effects of the H1N1 flu. Others aren't worried about the flu at all. Both reactions are normal.

The constant media coverage about the flu can make people anxious or frightened about their health or the health of the people they care about. There are ways to cope and keep a positive outlook.

What you can do to cope

Build resilience. People are resilient and do bounce back quickly after difficult events. Use the skills and experiences you have used in the past to help you manage any current anxiety.

Take care of yourself. Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Continue to live your life and do things you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly, get enough sleep and eat well. This will help you make good decisions when you're dealing with uncertainties.

Stay connected. Fear sometimes pushes people apart. We may think that we will catch the flu or give the flu to those who are close to us. Under stress we may not want to be around family, friends and neighbours but it is important to stay connected with others. By talking with people you trust you can share your feelings, relieve stress and cope better during difficult times. If you or someone you know becomes ill with H1N1 flu, stay connected by phone, e-mail or texting. If you are a caregiver for someone with the flu, be sure to wash your hands often.

Keep things in perspective. Government authorities and emergency response people plan for the very worst case scenario in order to protect everyone. Constant media coverage can raise public anxiety unnecessarily. Experienced scientists and other authorities are constantly reminding the public that for most people, symptoms of H1N1 flu are mild and go away completely, just like with any other flu. You can help yourself and the people around you by keeping things in perspective and going about your daily routines.

Stay informed. Learn as much as you can from accurate information sources (see below for websites that contain the most current and accurate information on H1N1 flu). Avoid exposure to too many media reports, especially alarmist reports and graphic stories that can raise anxiety.

Draw on personal methods of comfort. Use your spiritual or personal beliefs to comfort yourself and reassure those around you. Try to keep a positive attitude and remember the challenges you've successfully coped with in the past.

Keep talking. If you are worried about the flu, talk to someone – a family member, friend, doctor, member of the clergy or faith community, teacher, elder or mental health professional. If you notice a change in family, friends, neighbours or co-workers, encourage them to talk about their concerns. Then reassure them or help them find someone else to help them.

Stress can affect you physically and emotionally. It is normal in situations that may affect public health for people to have many kinds of reactions. For almost everyone these reactions will lessen as we get more information and we use healthy ways of coping.

Watch for changes in your:

body – Some people may have trouble sleeping or a change in appetite. Others may feel tired or get headaches or other aches and pains.

actions - Some may need to be around others more, while others may avoid people. Still others may feel a need to be doing things to deal with their worries and fears (ex: clean or exercise excessively).

feelings – Some people may feel overwhelmed, helpless or out of control, which may result in feelings of fear, distrust, anger or irritability. Some people may be very emotional and cry easily.

thinking – People may have difficulty concentrating and making decisions, or have trouble focusing at school or at work. Others may feel confused about the actual risk to their health.

Helping children cope

Children and youth can be affected by what they see and hear in the media. They're also influenced by the people who are important in their lives (parents, teachers, elders, other adults) as well as their friends. Children and youth often react to stress the way adults do so it's important for all adults to keep an eye on the children in their lives during stressful times.

Monitor any changes in your children's behaviour, reassure them that for most people the symptoms of H1N1 flu are mild and go away completely, just like with any other flu. Encourage them to keep talking about their feelings. (See H1N1 Flu Information for Children and Youth for further information at www.manitoba.ca)

When to get more help

If the usual coping methods are not working for you or someone you care about, there are professionals who can help. Contact any of the following:

1. Health Links – Info Santé can help you find appropriate resources through your local regional health authority. Call 788-8200 or toll-free 1-888-315-9257. Health Links-Info Santé has access to interpreters in 110 languages.
2. Manitoba Farm and Rural Stress Line
1-866-367-3276 (1-866-FOR-FARM) toll free
3. Klinik Community Health Centre 24-hour Crisis Line **786-8686 in Winnipeg; or 1-888-322-3019 toll free**

Where to get reliable information

When you have questions about things that may affect your health or the health of your loved ones, it may be helpful to get reliable information that can help you to understand the risks. Some of the best places to get this information are:

1. Health Links – Info Santé
788-8200 or toll-free 1-888-315-9257
2. Manitoba Health and Healthy Living
www.gov.mb.ca/health
3. The Public Health Agency of Canada
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/index-eng.php