



**FAMILY SERVICES**  
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS  
Your Partner in Workplace Health™

## ***Coping With the Stress of the H1N1 Flu Pandemic***

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In light of the recent outbreak of the H1N1 flu virus, it is natural to feel concerned about your health and the health of your family and friends. The abundance of media coverage on the perceived and actual risks of the outbreak can result in these concerns becoming overwhelming, and can contribute to increased feelings of stress and anxiety. While some people are able to cope with this added stress in the same manner as their day-to-day stress, others may experience more severe stress reactions which could include<sup>1</sup>:

<u>Emotions:</u>	feelings of sadness, anger, worry, or helplessness
<u>Thinking:</u>	confusion, poor concentration, problems remembering things
<u>Behaviour:</u>	changes in eating habits, changes in sleeping patterns, isolation, irritability
<u>Physical:</u>	being tired, over activity, headaches, stomachaches
<u>Spiritual:</u>	a change in a person's beliefs or anger about the event

There are practical ways to manage the stress that you and your family members are experiencing. Here are a few suggestions<sup>2</sup>:

- Learn about the flu, including its symptoms, how it is spread, the best way to protect against getting the flu, what to do if someone at home has flu-like symptoms, when and how to seek medical care for the flu, and what to do to limit your exposure to the flu. Sources of reliable information include [www.health.alberta.ca](http://www.health.alberta.ca) and [www.fightflu.ca](http://www.fightflu.ca)
- Although you need to stay informed, minimize exposure to television news or other information that might promote stress or panic.
- Continue routines for yourself and your family, such as regular meals, bedtimes and exercise.
- Limit children's exposure to disturbing stories or pictures. Have your children talk about how they are feeling, especially if they are afraid about what they see and hear.

You can also lower your level of stress by being adequately prepared. Being organized and well equipped will help you feel more in control and less anxious. Consider adopting the following preparedness strategies<sup>3</sup>:

- Reduce the likelihood of infection by using good personal hygiene and self-care practices.
- Keep at least a two-week supply of non-perishable easy-to-prepare food, water and other critical household and hygiene goods.
- Keep medical supplies, prescription and non-prescription drugs on hand.
- Be aware of your employer's pandemic plan and how it affects you.
- Watch for notes coming home from your child's school or day-care on how they are dealing with the pandemic and what they require of you.

If you are feeling stressed, scared or overwhelmed and want to talk with someone, please do not hesitate to access your Employee Assistance Program.

**FSEAP Toll Free Number 1-800-661-8246**

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<sup>1</sup> Sedgwick County, Kansas – News, *Dealing with Stress of a Potential Pandemic Flu*. Retrieved Nov 2, 2009, from [www.sedgwickcounty.org/communications/news\\_releases](http://www.sedgwickcounty.org/communications/news_releases)

<sup>2</sup> NCTSN – The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. *Pandemic Flu Fact Sheet*. Retrieved Nov 2, 2009, from [www.nctsn.org/nctsn\\_assets/pdfs/Pandemic\\_Flu\\_Factsheet.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/Pandemic_Flu_Factsheet.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> American Red Cross. *Preparing for a H1N1 Pandemic*. Retrieved Nov 2, 2009, from [www.redcross.org/.../Preparedness/SwineH1N1FluCopingFactSheet.pdf](http://www.redcross.org/.../Preparedness/SwineH1N1FluCopingFactSheet.pdf)