

# Managing Anxiety About H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu): A Message From Your AFA EAP

The sudden and near-constant stream of news reports about H1N1 Flu (swine flu) can cause anyone to feel anxious and worried. These reactions are understandable because there are unknowns about the spread and severity of the illness. Even during this period of uncertainty, you can take several steps to manage your anxiety and keep a positive outlook.

- **Keep things in perspective.** Government officials need to prepare for worst-case scenarios in order to protect the public. For example, schools could continue to close and group activities could be cancelled as part of a comprehensive layered mitigation approach aimed at reducing and slowing virus transmission. The public, however, does not need to expect the worst. To date, the cases that have been identified in the United States are not severe. Americans who have contracted the illness have recovered.
- **Get the facts.** Gather information that will help you accurately determine your risk so that you can take proper, reasonable precautions. Find a credible source of information. This is a rapidly evolving situation, so gather information at regular intervals in order to help you distinguish facts from rumors. Be wary of unsubstantiated rumors, which can be upsetting and may deter you from taking appropriate action.
- **Maintain a hopeful outlook.** Public health agencies around the globe are working on identifying outbreaks of the illness and to ensure the availability of medical care to those who are sick. Limit unnecessary worry and agitation by lessening the time you and your family spend watching or listening to upsetting media coverage.
- **Stay healthy.** A healthy lifestyle—including proper diet and exercise—is your best defense against any disease threat. Maintaining hygienic habits such as regularly washing your hands will also minimize your exposure to all types of germs and disease sources. A healthy body can have a

positive impact on your thoughts and emotions, enabling you to make better decisions and deal with the flu's uncertainties.

- **Build resilience.** Resilience is the skill of adapting well in the face of adversity or significant sources of stress. Draw on skills you have used in the past that helped you manage life's adversities and use those skills to help you manage your emotions during this challenging time.
- **Have a plan.** Think about how you might respond if the flu were discovered in your area. You may want to explore options for caring for sick family members, devise a back-up plan for closed daycare and schools, and establish an emergency family communication plan. Working out some of these scenarios in advance can lessen your anxiety.
- **Communicate with your children.** Discuss the flu with honest and age-appropriate information. If children have concerns, addressing those together may ease their anxiety and distress. Parents can also help allay distress by focusing children on routines and schedules that remain unchanged despite any changes due to swine flu preparations. Remember that children will observe adults behaviors and emotions for cues on how to manage their own emotions during this time.
- **Keep connected.** Maintaining social networks can foster a sense of normalcy, and provide valuable outlets for sharing feelings and relieving stress. If officials have recommended limiting your social contact to contain an outbreak, you can stay connected via e-mail and telephone.
- **Seek additional help.** If you have intense feelings of anxiety or are having trouble performing your job, contact your local EAP committee members. Their contact information can be obtained at 1-800-424-2406 or at [www.afanet.org](http://www.afanet.org) under the EAP department section.

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