

## How to Care for Someone with Influenza

You have been instructed by a healthcare provider that you or your loved one can best be cared for at home during this influenza outbreak. The following information is designed to help you care for that patient in the best way.

**Keep yourself healthy.** Get plenty of rest, wear a mask around your patient and **wash your hands frequently**, especially after touching things used or touched by your patient. Cover your coughs and sneezes. Keep tissues and a trash bag for their disposal within reach of the sick person.

- ❖ Keep the patient as comfortable as possible. The patient should rest or sleep as much as they wish, as it will help them to recover.
- ❖ To help reduce your patient's temperature and to treat their aches and pains, give ibuprofen (Advil™ or Motrin®) or acetaminophen (Tylenol™) regularly, as instructed on the bottle or box. **Do not use aspirin** for children or teenagers because it can cause Reye's syndrome, a life-threatening illness.
- ❖ Keep the patient well hydrated. If the person is not vomiting, offer small amounts of liquids frequently to prevent dehydration, even if he or she does not feel thirsty. If the sick person is not eating solid foods, include liquids that contain sugars and salts, such as broth or soups, sports drinks like Gatorade® (diluted half and half with water), Pedialyte® or Lytren® (undiluted), ginger ale, cola, and other sodas, but not diet drinks or drinks with high amounts of caffeine. Regular urination is a good sign of hydration. **Note: Your patient may need to drink more than usual if he or she has a fever.**
- ❖ If the person is vomiting, do not give any liquid or food by mouth for at least 1 hour. Let the stomach rest. Next, offer a clear liquid, such as water, weak tea, ginger ale, or broth in very small amounts. Start with 1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon of clear liquid every 10 minutes. Sucking on an ice cube is another option. If the person vomits, let the stomach rest again for an hour. Again, try to give small frequent amounts of clear liquid. When there is no vomiting, gradually increase the amount of liquid offered and use liquids that contain sugars and salts. After 6-8 hours of a liquid diet without vomiting, add solid food that is easy to digest, such as saltine crackers, dry toast, soup, mashed potatoes or rice. Gradually, return to a regular diet.
- ❖ Babies who are breast-fed and vomiting can continue to nurse. Let your baby nurse more often by breastfeeding for 4-5 minutes every 30-45 minutes or by offering small amounts (1/2 ounce or less at a time) of Pedialyte® or Lytren® every 10 minutes in a bottle.
- ❖ Keep a record of what you observe. Record the following information about the sick person **at least** once each day or more often as symptoms change. Include the date and time.
  - Check the person's temperature using an oral or ear thermometer.
  - Check the person's skin for color (pink, pale or bluish) and rash.
  - Record the approximate amount of liquids he or she drinks each day and through the night.
  - Record how many times the sick person goes to the bathroom each day and the color of the urine (clear to light yellow, dark yellow, orange, brown, or red).
  - Record all medications, dosages and times given.

## Additional Information

- ❖ Common symptoms of influenza are:
  - Fever (usually high)
  - Headache
  - Tiredness (can be extreme)
  - Cough
  - Sore Throat
  - Runny or stuffy nose
  - Body aches
  - Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea (more in children than adults).
  
- ❖ Fever is a sign that the body is fighting the infection. It will go away as the person gets better. Sponging with lukewarm (wrist-temperature) water may lower the person's temperature, but only during the period of sponging. Do not sponge with alcohol.
  
- ❖ Watch for the Following Signs of Dehydration or Not Drinking Enough Liquids:
  - Weakness or unresponsiveness
  - Decreased saliva/dry mouth and tongue
  - Sunken eyes
  - Skin tenting; check this by picking up layers of skin between your thumb and forefinger and **gently** pinching for 1 second. Normally, the skin will flatten out into its usual shape right away. If the person is dehydrated, the skin will "tent" or take 2 more seconds to flatten out. This is best checked on the belly skin of a child and on the upper chest of an adult.
  - Infants: dehydration symptoms would be having less than 3 wet diapers in the last 24 hours.
  - Dehydration causes people urinate less often and the urine becomes a dark yellow color. People who are getting enough liquids should urinate at least every 8-12 hours.
  - If the sick person is dehydrated, give sips or spoonfuls of liquids frequently over a 4-hour period. Watch for more frequent urination, a lighter color of urine and improvement in the person's overall condition.
  
- ❖ Dehydration in infants and the elderly can be dangerous. Seek medical attention immediately if symptoms continue to get worse. Young children can become dehydrated rapidly. Make certain that they get the following amounts of liquids if they are not eating solid food:
  - Young children: 1 ½ oz. per pound of body weight per day (multiply 1.5 times the weight of the child).
  - Older children and adults: at least 1 ½ to 2 ½ quarts per day (3-5 eight oz. cups or 2-3 twelve oz. cans or bottles).
  
- ❖ Watch for complications of influenza. Complications are common in individuals with health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and lung problems, but may occur with anyone who has the flu. If the sick person develops any of the following complications, seek medical attention immediately:
  - Difficulty breathing, fast breathing, or bluish color to the skin or lips
  - Coughing up blood
  - Signs of dehydration (not drinking enough and can not take enough fluids)
  - Difficulty responding or communicating appropriately or appears confused
  - Convulsions (seizures)
  - Gets worse after appearing to improve
  - Is an infant younger than 2 months old, with fever, poor feeding, or urinating less than 3 times a day