

PANDEMIC FLU

A Behavioral Health Guide

As we prepare nationally for a pandemic flu and become educated about the potential consequences and local resources, it is natural for us to feel concerned. This guide provides some of the common indicators of stress and explains ways to deal with these concerns as we emotionally and behaviorally prepare for a pandemic event.

▼ LEARN

- Having adequate information makes us more confident and increases our coping skills. Know your school, work, and community pandemic plans.
- Being aware of the likely day-to-day hardships a pandemic may cause will assist us in handling them. Consider the challenges and anticipated impacts on our lives.
- Be adequately informed without increasing anxiety through overexposure to media or internet reports. Maintain a balance in assessing information.
- Knowing how the flu is spread, what the symptoms are, and who is possibly at greater risk will aid us in monitoring ourselves and family members during an outbreak.
- Social distancing information should be shared with our families and children, such as:
 - ◆ Maintaining three feet of distance between ourselves and others. Show children the space using a yardstick or ruler.
 - ◆ Shopping at times when stores are least crowded.
 - ◆ Using drive-up windows at businesses.
 - ◆ Practicing good cough etiquette, washing hands frequently, etc.
 - ◆ Using our own pens when registering at doctor's offices, etc.
 - ◆ Working staggered shifts to limit risks and exposure from co-workers.

▼ PLAN

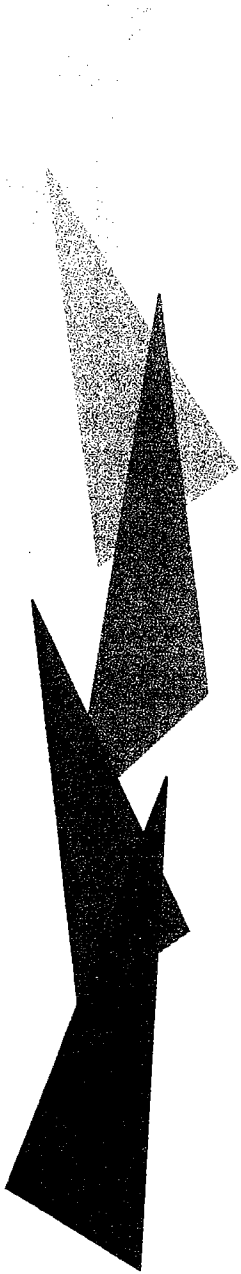
- Preparing reduces our risks and our fears. Consider having a ready list of physicians and pharmacy phone numbers, extra supplies of medications and food and some cash in case banks are closed.
- Know the risks and offer support to those working on behalf of our health and safety.
- Plan for likely behaviors and events in a pandemic (i.e. stigmatizing behaviors of individuals against those who are ill (beyond social distancing), limited hours of businesses, etc. Try to empathize without condoning negative behaviors by persons who do not understand.

▼ PROTECT

- Everyone is at risk and advised to follow best practices to prevent contracting the disease.
- Good health practices and supporting each other emotionally will help us and our family to prepare for a pandemic flu or other illnesses.

▼ PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

- People may show fear and avoid those who are exposed to persons living with pandemic patients, those working as first responders, or those who have recovered from the illness. This is considered stigmatizing behavior. Reduce the impact of stigma by:



- ♦ Educating family and friends on pandemic preparedness and where to access information such as www.pandemicflu.gov
 - ♦ Identifying strategies to lessen the impact of stigma (for example, being a friend to those who have already had the flu).
 - ♦ Explaining stigma to children and teenagers, and what they should do if they see friends practicing these behaviors; such as, being a friend to those being stigmatized, or providing accurate information.
- Fear is a natural human emotion which can increase through dread, awareness, unfamiliarity, the perceived scale of the pandemic, and personally identifying with victims. Choose to overcome pandemic fears by making a plan and helping others prepare, talking with others about pandemic strategies, and practicing stress management through exercise, prayer, meditation, breathing or relaxing activities. Take breaks from thinking about a pandemic and maintain a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

▼ COMMON REACTIONS TO ABNORMAL SITUATIONS

- Adults and children may have some of the following common reactions to preparing or responding to the pandemic . Understanding these stressors enhances our coping skills.

EMOTIONAL SHOCK, ANGER, GUILT, TERROR, HELPLESSNESS, DESPAIR

COGNITIVE CONFUSION, MEMORY LOSS, BLAMING, POOR CONCENTRATION

BEHAVIORAL ISOLATION, CHANGE IN SLEEPING PATTERNS AND EATING HABITS

PHYSICAL FATIGUE, HEADACHES, HAIR LOSS, INCREASED HEARTBEAT, STOMACHACHES

SPIRITUAL BECOMING CLOSE TO GOD, WITHDRAWING FROM GOD, ANGER AT GOD

▼ TAKING ACTION

- Learn what you can do in advance. Create a plan and then lead your lives in a normal way.
- Build resilience in your personal and work lives by learning to identify emotions and positive ways to respond behaviorally.
- Know that our daily lives may be significantly different during a pandemic.
- Be involved in faith-based and other community organizations and identify ways that the groups can maintain communication, commitment, and outreach. Doing something to help others helps us.
- Work with persons with special needs regarding their personal and their facility's pandemic/ emergency plan to identify additional preparedness efforts you can undertake.
- Seek support from family, friends and colleagues.
- Make use of available community services.
- Continue your daily schedule at work and leisure activities.
- Seek professional mental health assistance if things are falling apart, you feel depressed, there is no medical explanation for chronic physical problems, or you feel hopelessness or extreme anger. There is help available to assist you in getting through this.

For more information,
contact the
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