

Ten Things To Do Before Swine Flu Hits You

Dear Reader,

Swine flu, known officially as H1N1, continues to make news, and if experts are correct, will make many of us sick in the months to come. If this determined little organism does make itself a part of your life expect to be spending five to seven days (at least) at home, on the couch, feeling pretty lousy.

Plan ahead now, while you're feeling fine, for any possible downtime. Here are ten things you can do now:

- 1) Have a backup plan - how will you handle work, college classes or other obligations? Does your company, or business, have a flu leave policy? How will you make up class work? Plan ahead now, while you're healthy and not under the gun.
- 2) Touch base with friends - you might need them to help out when you're sick, especially if you live alone.
- 3) Stockpile flu relief supplies - be sure you have tissues, fever meds, cough syrup and a working thermometer. If you're using face masks, have a large enough supply so you can use them once and discard.
- 4) Stock up on comfort foods - whatever these are for you, be sure they're in the house and ready to go. Especially good choices are tea, chicken noodle soup, saltine crackers, white bread for toast. Liquids are especially important, have water, ginger ale and other favorite beverages on hand too.
- 5) Care for your hands - sick or not, you'll be washing them a lot, so be sure to use a gentle soap and creamy hand lotion to keep your hands from being raw and chapped. Applying hand lotion before bedtime can also be helpful.
- 6) Plan now for what you can do - with several days on the couch; you'll quickly be bored by daytime TV. While you're feeling well, search out DVDs you'd like to watch, handheld games to play, books or magazines you like - skip anything that requires intense concentration.
- 7) Know your flu risk - pregnant women, children, young adults or anyone with a chronic medical condition is more likely to be really knocked for a loop by H1N1. Those with asthma, diabetes or heart disease should seek medical attention at the first sign of flu-like symptoms.
- 8) Keep your distance - to keep your germs to yourself, you'll want to stay at least 6 feet away from others. Use a tape measure in the comfort of your own home to see just how far away that really is.
- 9) Get a doctor - if you don't have a primary care physician, now's the time to look around and find one you'd like to see. Make an appointment for a physical so they know you. If you then

develop flu-like symptoms, call the office first, you may not need to be seen.

10) Know when it's an emergency - while most cases of H1N1 have been mild, there have been those who needed to go to the hospital. Some people have died from this illness.

Children should get immediate medical attention if they -

- Have fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Have bluish or gray skin color
- Are not drinking enough fluid
- Are not waking up or not interacting
- Have severe or persistent vomiting
- Are so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Have flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and a worse cough
- Have fever with a rash
- Have a fever and then have a seizure or sudden mental or behavioral change

Grown ups need to get urgent medical attention if they...

- Have difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Have pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Have sudden dizziness
- Exhibit Confusion
- Have severe or persistent vomiting
- Have flu-like symptoms that improve but then come back with worsening fever or cough

Once you've prepared yourself with these tips, the next best thing you can do for yourself and your family is to stay informed.

The illness is thought to spread from person to person due to coughing or sneezing, so be sure to wash your hands a lot and keep your distance from those who are ill - if you can. Regularly check out the CDC and World Health Organization updates so you know what's happening and getting the facts, without the media hype.