

H1N1 Fact Sheet

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How to Recognize and Manage Stress in Children During a Pandemic – Parents and Caregivers

Parents and caregivers may notice changes in their children's behaviour that could indicate they are afraid or having a hard time coping with recent news regarding the H1N1 Influenza pandemic. Children may not be able to explain how they are feeling and may not notice any differences in how they are behaving. Listed below are some behaviours you might observe.

Ages 4-12

- Emotions - feeling more afraid, scared or sad
- Anxiety - tense, upset, stomachache, headache
- Excessive preoccupation with getting the flu - asking for reassurance from parents/caregivers, checking with parents/caregivers about physical complaints
- Nightmares or reluctance going to bed - anxiety and fear is often worse at night and children may have more difficulty settling at bedtime, waking up more frequently through the night without being able to settle back to sleep on their own
- Clinging to parents/caregivers - trouble separating at school, reluctance to do sleepovers, concerns about parents/caregivers travelling

Ages 13-18

- Emotions - scared, irritable, sad
- Worry - concerns that they or family and friends might become ill, and thinking about what might happen in Canada and the world
- Anxiety - feeling tense, upset, impatient, physical complaints of stomachache, headache
- Excessive preoccupation with getting the flu - reading internet and news articles about the flu, checking with parents/caregivers about symptoms and requesting physician visits
- Behaviour - more easily frustrated, quicker to lose temper, less compliant with daily routine and requests

You may want to try some of the following suggestions to help your children cope with the feelings and behaviours they are experiencing:

- Acknowledge children's fears
- Provide reassurance by telling children lots of people are working hard to keep them safe
- Maintain daily routines – children and teens thrive on structure
- Provide predictable bedtime routines
- Be calm and model confidence. Children learn to cope by watching how their parents or caregivers cope in times of stress. Young children take their cues from parents/caregivers as to how scary things are based on parents'/caregivers' reactions
- Provide information your child can understand
- Limit exposure to news stories and images as these are not designed for delivery to children and youth audiences
- Reinforce things children can do to protect themselves - hand washing & coughing into sleeve
- Help your child keep in touch with friends by phone, e-mail or MSN, etc.
- Encourage questions

Seek professional support when needed. For help with mental health problems, call the mental health program at your local district health authority and/or your health centre if you live in a First Nation community.

