

Caring for someone who is sick

- adapted from the Public Health Agency of Canada

Here are some ideas and suggestions to keep in mind when caring for someone who is sick. Most people who get sick with the H1N1 flu virus can be cared for at home. People with risk conditions — such as asthma or diabetes — should not look after people who are sick, if possible.

Step #1 Protect yourself and others

Clean your hands with either soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after touching items that the sick person has touched (such as dishes, towels and clothes), before you eat and before and after touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

If possible, have the **sick person wear a mask** to control the spread of virus filled droplets. This is especially important, when someone is within two metres or six feet of a sick person. If the sick person cannot wear a mask, encourage the use of a tissue when coughing and sneezing. Dispose of the tissue immediately.

There is no evidence that wearing a mask will protect you from getting the flu. However, if you wear a mask, wash your hands before and after putting on, or taking off, the mask.

Get yourself and your family vaccinated with the H1N1 vaccine when it is offered in your community. Someone who is sick with H1N1 flu may need to wait to get the vaccine.

Step #2 Allow the sick person to rest (away from others)

It is expected that anyone sick with the H1N1 flu virus will need lots of rest and should stay at home. The sick person will be contagious for about seven days from the onset of the symptoms - especially in the first few days.

Clean items (such as the phone, TV remote) and surfaces that the sick person has touched using normal household disinfectant. The virus can survive on hard surfaces for up to 48 hours.

The sick person can resume normal activities 24 hours after symptoms are resolved.

Step #3 Treat the fever and cough

Fever often comes with chills or aches and pains. Certain medications (such as acetaminophen, for example Tylenol®, or ibuprofen, for example Advil®) may help to reduce these symptoms. Do not give Aspirin® to children to treat a fever, as it has been linked to Reye's Syndrome¹.

¹ A potentially fatal disease associated with aspirin consumption by children with viral diseases.

Step #4 Give lots of fluids and nutritious food and ensure a smoke-free environment

Warm drinks, such as tea with honey and lemon or chicken soup, can be very soothing for a sore throat. The sick person may not have an appetite, but simple foods may be welcomed.

Cigarette smoking is hard on the lungs of a person with an infection. The sick person should avoid smoking. Second-hand smoke is harmful also, so people should not smoke around the sick person.

Step #5 Keep the sick person's things separate

Each sick person should have his/her own personal items (towel, face cloth, toothbrush etc.) and they should be kept separate from the belongings of others in the house. Wash your hands after touching the items belonging to the sick person and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Keep common surfaces (door knobs, light switches) clean and disinfected.

Step #6 Stay alert for complications

When treated at home with proper care, most people will begin to feel better after a few days. Take the sick person's temperature daily to track any fever. Sometimes people with underlying medical conditions - such as asthma or diabetes, or who are pregnant - may develop complications and so may need to see a health care provider. If you have questions about symptoms, call the HealthLine at 1-877-800-0002.