

# Helping Children Cope with Anxiety about H1N1 Flu

Concern over H1N1 Flu can make children anxious. Children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. If parents seem overly worried, children may panic. Helping children cope with anxiety regarding the flu requires providing information about preventing illness without causing alarm. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.

## Here are some suggestions for helping children cope with anxiety about the flu:

- **Remain calm and reassuring.** What you say and do about the flu virus and current prevention efforts can either increase or decrease students' anxiety.
- **Make yourself available.** Your children may need extra attention from you and may want to talk about their concerns and questions.
- **Know the symptoms of H1N1 Flu and how it spreads.** Symptoms include fever, sore throat, and cough. Some people also have a runny nose, fatigue, body aches, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. The virus is transmitted through the coughing or sneezing of people infected with the virus. The virus is not spread by eating pork or other foods.
- **Review basic hygiene practices:**
  - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. (Or cough or sneeze into your sleeve if a tissue is not available.)
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand cleaners also are effective.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
  - Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- **Monitor television viewing.** Limit television viewing or access to information on the Internet. Constantly watching updates on the status of the flu virus can increase anxiety. Engage your child in games or other interesting activities instead.
- **Maintain a normal routine to the extent possible.** Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring and promotes physical health. Ensure that children get plenty of sleep, regular meals, and exercise.
- Middle school and high school students are able to discuss the issue in a more in-depth fashion and can be referred directly to appropriate sources of H1N1 facts (e.g., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)). Provide honest, accurate, and factual information. Having such knowledge can help students feel a sense of control.

Additional resources regarding health, wellness, and coping with the current situation can be found on the Montgomery County Public Schools H1N1 Flu website at [www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org).