

**VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Behavioral Health Disaster Response Team**

Swine Influenza Alert 2009

Are you feeling worried? Here are some suggestions to manage your stress.

Threat of severe flu outbreak in our country can become a stressful event. It is, therefore, extremely important that you receive information that is timely and accurate so that you can care well for yourself and your loved ones. This will help us all to respond appropriately and help each other through what could be a stressful time.

As news of determined cases of swine flu and precautions travels across our airwaves, it is important for you to balance your daily activities and maintain a healthy outlook. However, we all realize that as daily news raises concerns, and perhaps comes closer to home, we can experience increased stress. In such cases, it is **normal** to experience the following:

- Pre-occupation with the “news” to the point where you cease your normal routine
- Increased anxiety, irritability, or impatience
- Change in sleep and appetite
- Inability to concentrate on what you are doing

Some people may experience more severe stress reactions, particularly if the flu outbreak intensifies. These can include physical reactions such as nausea, stomachache, trembling, shaking, and sweating. Worry, fear, and anxiety can make us feel sick. If you are experiencing these symptoms, it is very important that you check in with your medical provider to assess your health status. If you don't have a medical provider, you can call your District Health Department for guidance. If it is determined that you don't have the flu, but you are struggling with stress and anxiety around this issue, reach out to friends and family for support, or phone your community mental health hotline for support. These phone numbers are listed at the bottom of this fact sheet.

Some Tips for Coping with the Stress of Swine Flu Outbreak

- Continue routines for yourself and your family, such as regular meals, bedtimes and exercise
- Keep busy. Focus on day-to-day plans
- Avoid drugs and alcohol. These can make you less alert and can cause serious health problems
- Stay connected with friends and family. Reach out to people by phone, e-mail, text, and twitter
- Listen to the television or radio for health and safety information. Don't spend every waking moment listening – balance your need to know with routine and enjoyable activities
- If you feel scared or overwhelmed, talk with someone about your feelings. This can reduce your stress and help you feel less lonely

How can I help my child to cope?

- Talk about your own feelings clearly and calmly; explain to your child that people can experience different feelings and these are all a normal response to stress
- Provide information that your child can understand
- Tell your child that you will do everything you can to keep him/her safe
- Help your child to keep in touch with friends by phone and e-mail
- Encourage children to draw pictures, color, paint, or use clay. Art work can help children to express their feelings
- Hold and hug your child often, reassuring and comforting.
- Maintain your child's routine --- laugh and play
- Teach your child things he/she can do for protection from spreading germs, such as hand washing and coughing into his/her sleeve

Recovery

- Remember that stress reactions are NORMAL responses to uncommon events. For most people, these reactions will go away in time.
- Talk to someone about your feelings
- Find fun and relaxing activities for yourself, your friends, and your family
- Get in a routine; healthy routines create (or re-create) stability in our lives
- Exercise and get regular rest
- If your stressful symptoms persist, call your local community mental health center for assistance.

**Find ways to help others! Offer support to others!
Share information about resources!**

For periodic alerts and recommendations as the outbreak progresses, please refer to the Vermont Department of Health website: <http://healthvermont.gov/> or the CDC website: <http://cdc.gov/swineflu>.

Other Helpful Contacts

Health Information

District Health Offices (802)

Burlington 863-7323
Rutland 786-5811
White River Jct. 295-8820
St. Albans 524-7970
Barre 479-4200
Brattleboro 257-2880
Bennington 447-3531
Middlebury 388-4644
St. Johnsbury 748-5151
Newport 334-6707
Morrisville 888-7447

Social/Emotional Support

Community Mental Health Centers

The Howard Center (802) 660-3678
Rutland Mental Health (802) 775-1000
Clara Martin Center (802) 728-4466
NW Counseling and Support (802) 524-6554
Washington Cty. Mental Health (802) 229-0591
Healthcare & Rehab Serv. of SE VT (800) 622-4235
United Counseling Services (802) 442-5491
Counseling Service of Addison Cty (802) 388-7641
Northeast Kingdom Human Services (802) 748-3181
Northeast Kingdom Human Services (802) 334-6744
Lamoille Cty. Mental Health Services (802) 888-4635