

COPING WITH YOUR EMOTIONS DURING A PANDEMIC FLU EMERGENCY*

The information in this brochure can help you to identify and cope with anxiety related to a pandemic flu outbreak.

The emotional impact of a public health emergency, such as pandemic flu, can have a powerful effect on the mental health of individuals of all ages. People naturally become alarmed and upset when they believe that their health may be threatened. However, during these times of heightened concerns regarding public health risks, it is critically important to take care of yourself and monitor your own emotional reactions. Tending to your own mental health and emotional needs may help you to function and feel better and make you a better, more reliable resource for friends, colleagues, and loved ones in helping them to better handle their concerns.

When We Don't Know For Sure

Anxiety is related to fear of the unknown. It is normal to feel anxious and worried about a spreading disease, especially if there is no known cause or cure.

Coping with your feelings during times of uncertainty can be challenging, but it is important to remember that *you are not alone*.

All people will react in their own way to a pandemic flu outbreak.

Normal reactions include:

Physical

- Headaches, tiredness
- Fast pulse, high blood pressure
- Changes in appetite
- Unexplained aches or pains
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much

Emotional

- Panic, anxiety
- Distrust, fear
- Anger, irritability
- Sadness, depression
- Blame
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Increased stress

Mental

- Trouble concentrating
- Problems with work or school
- Memory problems
- Troubling thoughts that won't go away
- Concern about health issues

Behavioral

- Avoiding others
- Increased substance abuse
- Excessive cleaning or washing
- Being overly cautious, jumpiness

Here are some ways you can cope with stress and anxiety:

- Limit your exposure to graphic news stories
- Get accurate, timely information from reliable sources
- Educate yourself about the specific health hazards associated with pandemic flu
- Maintain your normal daily routine to the extent possible
- Exercise, eat well, and rest
- Stay active—physically and mentally
- Stay in touch with family and friends
- Find comfort in your spiritual and personal beliefs
- Keep a sense of humor
- Find healthy ways to express your feelings

Stay Connected

The fear associated with a pandemic flu emergency can push people apart.

People who are normally close to friends and family may avoid contact because they are afraid they might get sick.

Sindecuse Health Center staff will tell you how to protect yourself and your loved ones. Until then, stay connected by phone and through e-mail.

If you are anxious about a health risk, talk to someone who can help. This may be a doctor or mental health professional at the Sindecuse Health Center or in your home community, a family member, friend, clergy member, or WMU faculty member or administrator.

If you notice a big change in a loved one, friend, or co-worker, reach out to them. Make some time to talk. Watching out for others shows that you care. It can be comforting to both of you.

If you or someone you know is having a hard time managing their emotions, seek help from a medical or mental health professional.

Get Reliable Information

When we face uncertainty about health risks, it is important to keep things in perspective.

Get information during a public health emergency from: <http://www.cdc.gov/>

*Adapted with permission from the University of Nebraska