

# Home Care for the Flu

During a regular flu season and even during a pandemic, most people may not need to see a doctor and may be able to get better care at home. This is called *home care*.

People who live alone may need to take care of themselves. If you live alone and become sick during a flu pandemic, stay in touch with others by phone or e-mail and ask for help if needed.

## Treating the Flu at Home

Many people may get better on their own when they stay home, rest, and take over-the-counter medicine (medicine you can buy without a doctor's prescription). Some people may have antiviral medication prescribed by a doctor. Antibiotics do not help treat the flu. The three most important things to do when treating the flu at home are:

1. Check for the signs of illness.
2. Give medicine to reduce the symptoms of flu.
3. Give lots of liquids.

### I. Keep a log of the signs of illness.

Write down the date, the time, how high the fever is, and any other signs of illness (such as headache).

Keep track of any medicines taken (date and time and how much medicine).

If possible, make a new entry when signs of illness change.

### 2. Reduce the symptoms of flu.

Use over-the-counter medicine (medicine that does not need a doctor's prescription) to reduce fever and pain from headache, body aches, and sore throat.

Use ibuprofen (such as Advil™ or Motrin™) or acetaminophen (such as Tylenol™). Be sure to read the directions on the package.

- ***Do not give aspirin to infants, children, or teenagers.*** Aspirin can cause Reye's syndrome, a life-threatening illness.

Antibiotics will not help treat flu or cold viruses.

### 3. Give lots of liquids.

Begin offering lots of liquids at the first signs someone is sick with the flu. It is very important to give lots of liquids to help prevent dehydration. Dehydration can happen when the body loses too much water from high fever, vomiting (throwing up), or diarrhea (loose, watery stools). Dehydration can be serious, especially in children.

Offer clear liquids such as water, juice, and clear soups (for example, chicken broth). Popsicles, iced drinks, and ice cubes can also help.

When someone has high fever, give liquids that contain electrolytes to prevent dehydration (for example, Pedialyte™ and Infalyte™). Electrolytes

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are salts and minerals that control the amount of water in your body. You can find electrolyte drinks at the drug store or grocery store. You can also make your own electrolyte drink for someone who is older than twelve years.

#### How to Make an Electrolyte Drink

Combine:

- 1 quart of drinking water
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon table salt
- 2 tablespoons of sugar

Mix well until the salt and sugar dissolve. Add lemon juice for flavor, if desired.

*(Note: If you don't have baking soda, add another 1/4 teaspoon of salt.)*

- long-term illness (such as heart or lung disease, diabetes, HIV, cancer) gets worse

**If you have a long-term illness or are pregnant, you have a higher risk for getting very sick from the flu. Contact your medical provider during a pandemic.**

#### When should I call 9-1-1?

Call 9-1-1 if you cannot reach your health care provider and you or a member of your household has any of the following signs of illness:

- difficulty breathing or chest pain with each breath
- bluish skin
- stiff neck
- inability to move an arm or leg
- seizure
- crankiness and/or confusion

### When to Call or Seek Medical Help

Call your health care provider if these signs of illness appear:

- high fever
- dehydration
- shaking chills
- coughing that produces thick mucus
- difficulty breathing



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### Limit the Spread of Flu Virus

It is important to take extra steps to prevent the spread of flu virus as you care for someone who has the flu. To limit the spread of illness:

- Select one person in the household to take care of someone who is home with the flu. (The caretaker should be the only person to go in and out of the room with meals, drinks, medicines, etc.)
- Keep the sick person in a separate room, if you can. If that's not possible, try to keep the sick person away from others in the house. (Someone who is sick should not have any visitors until he or she recovers.)
- Keep your distance as much as possible and avoid direct and close contact.
- Open windows occasionally, if possible, to let air flow through the room.
- Clean common surfaces and objects every day. (For example, clean doorknobs and handles, light switches, microwaves, phones, remote controls, toilet seats and handles, faucets, and non-fabric toys.) Use a labeled household disinfectant or a chlorine bleach mixture. Use gloves to protect hands from chemicals.

### How to Make Your Own Sanitizing Solution

If you do not have store-bought disinfectants, you can make your own sanitizing solution by mixing 1/4 cup of bleach with one gallon of clean water. Label container, "sanitizer." *Do not use this water for drinking.*



- Always wash your hands *before* and *after* taking care of someone who is sick. (Make sure everyone in your household washes their hands often, too.)
- Use disposable gloves, if you have them, whenever you come in contact with the sick person's body fluids or mucus. (For example, when doing laundry or throwing away their tissues.) Throw away gloves after each use. Don't forget to wash hands.
- If possible, ask the sick person to wear a surgical mask when others are close by or if they are coughing and sneezing. (Surgical masks should

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be changed and thrown away when they become moist.)

- Have the sick person use hand-gel to wash his or her hands, if possible, after coughing or sneezing, touching dirty tissues, or removing a surgical mask.
- Do not share items such as eating utensils, cups, computers, phones, pens, clothes, and towels.

## **Other Things to Do**

### **Help the sick person feel better.**

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To help the sick person feel better:

- Make him or her as comfortable as possible.
- Keep tissues and a trash bag within reach.
- Offer favorite books, music, movies, and toys or games.

### **Have supplies on hand.**

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Keep extra supplies of food, water, medications, and your disaster supply kit on hand. These home care supplies include:

- thermometer
- soap
- box of disposable gloves
- medicine to reduce fever and pain (such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen)
- bleach
- alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- paper towels
- tissues
- surgical masks (one for each person)
- sugar, baking soda, salt

**For more information on treating the flu, go to [www.publichealth.lacounty.gov](http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov) and [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov).**