

# How to Protect Yourself and Your Loved Ones Against Seasonal Flu, or Any Cough Illness

## What is the flu?

Influenza, known as flu, is a very contagious disease of the respiratory (breathing) system. The flu is caused by a virus that is easily passed from one person to another by coughing and sneezing. For most people, the flu makes them feel very sick, but they generally get better in about a week. However, young children, people older than 65 years of age, pregnant women and people with chronic medical conditions can have serious complications from the flu.

The following tips can help protect you and your loved ones during the regular flu season, as well as from the threat of bird flu or any other cough illness.

## Wash your hands.

Wash your hands often with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

## Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.

Cough or sneeze into a tissue or the inside of your elbow. Throw tissues away and wash your hands.

## Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth.

This decreases the chance that you will get the flu virus or other germs into your body, or that you will pass the flu to others.

## Clean things that are touched often.

Clean things that are touched often, such as door or refrigerator handles, computer key boards/mouse, phones and water faucets.

## Avoid contact with people who are sick.

Avoid unnecessary holding, kissing or sharing food, dishes and glasses with anyone who has a cold or the flu. People with young children, weak immune system or a chronic illness should avoid large crowds.

## Symptoms of the flu include:

- Fever (102° – 104°), lasting 3 – 5 days
- Headache, severe muscle and joint aches
- Sore throat
- Tiredness, can be extreme and last 2 weeks or more
- Dry cough
- Runny or stuffy nose

## What to do if you have flu symptoms:

- Rest in bed and drink lots of fluids (water or juice).
- Take non-aspirin pain relievers to reduce fever and pain. (Never give aspirin to children with fever - they can get a serious disease called Reye syndrome.)

- Stay home and avoid public activities for at least 5 days (7 days for children), so that you don't pass the flu to other people.

## If you are at risk for complications from the flu, call a health care provider as soon as you have flu-like symptoms.

People at risk for complications from the flu include:

- Infants and young children
- People 65 years of age and older
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic medical conditions such heart or lung disease, diabetes and people whose immune system is weakened because of disease or medicine

## Call for help immediately if:

- Breathing is fast, difficult or painful
- The skin is dusky or bluish in color
- The person has chest pain
- The person is disoriented or unable to walk or sit up, or function normally (others might be the first to notice this, especially in elderly people)

## Call a health care provider if:

- The fever lasts more than 3 - 5 days
- The fever or cough goes away for 24 hours or more, and then returns
- There is yellow mucous with the cough
- The person is not able to drink enough fluids (urine is dark or has not urinated for 12 or more hours)

## Call a health care provider if your infant or child has any of the symptoms above, or if he or she:

- Still "acts sick" once the fever is gone
- Looks very sick or is unusually drowsy or fussy
- Has a stiff neck, severe headache, severe sore throat, severe earache or unexplained rash, or has repeated vomiting or diarrhea
- Has a fever and has had a seizure
- Gets the flu and has a weakened immune system because of disease or medicine.

---

Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Produced by the Northern Berkshire  
Community Pandemic Planning Committee

# In the Event of a Flu Pandemic or Community Health Emergency

Pandemic flu occurs when a new flu virus develops that spreads quickly and infects large numbers of people at the same time. We do not know when a flu pandemic may occur, but being prepared for seasonal flu will also help you in the event of a pandemic.

The Northern Berkshire Community Pandemic Planning Committee has been at work for more than a year preparing for the possibility of a community health emergency such as a flu pandemic, and other types of emergencies. Below are resources for information that you should turn to during such an event.

In a health emergency, North Adams Regional Hospital may open an emergency treatment site at the St. Anthony Parish Center on St. Anthony Drive in downtown North Adams.

## Where to Get Information:

### Radio:

WNAW (AM1230), WUPE (FM100.1), WAMC (FM90.3)

### Television:

Northern Berkshire Community Television (Channels 15, 16, and 17); WNYT (Channel 13); WTEN (Channel 10); WRGB (Channel 6); Capital News 9 (Channel 7)

### Internet:

[www.nbhealth.org](http://www.nbhealth.org); [www.iberkshires.com](http://www.iberkshires.com)

### Newspapers:

North Adams Transcript ([www.thetranscript.com](http://www.thetranscript.com))  
Berkshire Eagle ([www.berkshireeagle.com](http://www.berkshireeagle.com))  
The Advocate ([www.advocateweekly.com](http://www.advocateweekly.com))

### Useful Phone Numbers:

North Adams Regional Hospital:	413-664-5000
VNA & Hospice of Northern Berkshire:	413-664-4536
North Adams Health Department:	413-662-3020
Adams Board of Health:	413-743-8330
Williamstown Board of Health:	413-458-9344

**Northern Berkshire Community Coalition:** 413-663-7588

## Supplies to have on hand:

- A thermometer that does not contain mercury
- Non-aspirin pain relievers such as acetaminophen (Tylenol<sup>®</sup>) or ibuprofen (Advil<sup>®</sup>, Motrin<sup>®</sup>, etc.)
- Cough syrup
- Drinks – fruit juice, sports drinks
- Light food – clear soups, crackers, applesauce, pop-sicles
- Phone number of family health care provider

## Flu: What You Can Do—Caring for People at Home

For free copies of this booklet, contact the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at (978) 640-9673 or (888) 658-2850. This and other information about flu are available at the MDPH Influenza website, [www.mass.gov/dph/flu](http://www.mass.gov/dph/flu)

## The Berkshire Medical Reserve Corps

**MRC** units are community-based and function as a way to organize locally and utilize volunteers who want to donate their time and expertise to prepare for and respond to emergencies and promote healthy living throughout the year. **MRC** volunteers supplement existing emergency and public health resources. Any interested community member can be a part of the **MRC**. The MRC includes medical and public health professionals such as physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, veterinarians, and epidemiologists as well as non-medical volunteers such as interpreters, chaplains, office workers, legal advisors, and others. Information: 413-441-9060 or [www.wmmrc.org](http://www.wmmrc.org).

## Massachusetts System for Advance Registration of Volunteer Health Professionals

If you are a health care professional in our community we encourage you to sign up to become a MSAR Volunteer. This identification and advance credentialing process allows immediate response in the event you are able to help in an emergency. Visit [www.mass.gov/MSAR](http://www.mass.gov/MSAR)