

# Seasonal and H1N1 Flu Tips: Guidance for Faith-Based Organizations

The H1N1 influenza (flu) virus, formerly known as Swine Flu, is currently causing illness in people throughout the United States and countries around the world, causing the World Health Organization to declare a pandemic. The following information was obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). We encourage you to keep up-to-date by visiting [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). The following information can be used for seasonal flu and H1N1 flu.

## **WHAT STEPS CAN LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS SERVICES OR COMMUNITY MEETINGS TAKE IF THERE IS AN OUTBREAK OF FLU IN MY COMMUNITY?**

- Encourage people to wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub. Make hand sanitizer available to people attending religious services or community meetings.
- Remind people to cough or sneeze into an elbow, or use a tissue and then wash hands.
- Reduce crowding as much as possible. Encourage people to spread out more throughout meeting rooms. People gathering in close proximity may increase the risk of flu transmission.
- Identify which activities may increase the chance of spreading flu and make decisions about changing or limiting these activities in order to help keep people healthy.
- Many religious services and community meetings involve a time of greeting or recognition by shaking hands or hugging. Encouraging interaction without physical contact and implementing social distancing measures may reduce the spread of flu in your community. A tip sheet about social distancing is available at [www.medinahhealth.org](http://www.medinahhealth.org).
- Some religious traditions and rituals emphasize eating and drinking from communal dishes and vessels. Flu transmission may be possible in these circumstances. People can carry the flu virus before feeling sick. If flu is circulating widely in your community, faith and community leaders may consider adjusting such practices in order to reduce the spread of flu.
- Encourage people with flu-like illness to stay home. The spread of flu can be decreased if people with flu-like illness stay home for at least 24 hours after they are free of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- If there is widespread flu illness in your community, discuss the risks of attending gatherings for those at high risk of medical complications from flu. By avoiding gatherings, these individuals may reduce their risk of becoming ill with flu.
- Provide alternative opportunities for participation whenever possible for individuals who are ill, home-bound, or have a high-risk of flu complications and will not be able to attend gatherings.
- Check [http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/public\\_gatherings.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/public_gatherings.htm) for additional guidance on holding public gatherings, including religious services.

## HOW CAN MY ORGANIZATION PROVIDE EMOTIONAL COMFORT AND SUPPORT TO MY COMMUNITY DURING FLU SEASON?

- Provide community members with support and stress relief activities.
- Utilize existing mental health materials and resources, especially those focused on coping with 2009 H1N1 flu. Materials are available at [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov).
- Encourage clergy, lay counselors, staff, and volunteers to maintain their own psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Also, encourage them to seek help when needed.
- Connect community members to existing mental health and counseling services in the community. Check <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/databases/> for information on mental health services in your community.

## HOW CAN MY ORGANIZATION PREVENT AND STOP THE SPREAD OF STIGMA AROUND 2009 H1N1FLU?

Your organization plays an important role in reducing stigma. Stigma during the spring 2009 H1N1 flu outbreaks placed blame on certain people who contracted the disease and misrepresented how the disease was spread. Your organization can help to avoid stigma and blame while meeting people's real desire to avoid infection by:

- Delivering public health messages that address people's concerns;
- Dispelling rumors, misinformation, fear, and anxiety present in your community; and
- Modeling respectful and compassionate behavior when interacting with members of communities that are being stigmatized.

## PROTECT YOURSELF, YOUR FAMILY, AND YOUR COMMUNITY EVERY FLU SEASON

- Stay informed by logging onto [www.medinahhealth.org](http://www.medinahhealth.org) or visit [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov) for *H1N1 Flu: A Guide for Community and Faith-based Organizations*.
- Cough or sneeze into an elbow, or use a tissue and then wash your hands.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, especially after possible exposure to the flu virus. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth – germs spread this way.
- Get prepared—have an emergency preparedness kit and plan at home.
- Get your seasonal flu shot. Contact the Medina County Health Department, Division of Public Health Nursing for more details, or check our website at [www.medinahhealth.org](http://www.medinahhealth.org) for the latest flu clinic schedule.



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