



4 September 2009

Fact sheet: Swine flu advice for carers

Who is this factsheet for?

This factsheet is for anyone who provides regular, substantial and unpaid support to a friend, relative, partner or other person who cannot manage without help because of illness, frailty or disability.

A carer does not necessarily have to live in the same house, or be related to the person they look after.

A carer often provides a range of support which may include personal care such as washing and dressing, practical care such as feeding and helping with medication, and emotional support such as providing company.

Carers have a valuable role in helping people to manage at home, and we recognise that carers need help and support themselves during the swine flu pandemic.

All about swine flu

What are the symptoms?

The majority of people who have had swine flu so far have described mild cold or flu-like symptoms.

These include the sudden onset of fever (high temperature), cough or shortness of breath. Other symptoms can include headache, sore throat, tiredness, aching muscles, chills, sneezing, runny nose or a loss of appetite.

Some people with swine flu have also reported vomiting and diarrhoea.

Are people with underlying illnesses more likely to catch swine flu?

People with serious existing health conditions, such as cancer, and older people (aged 60 or over) are more likely to develop complications from seasonal flu, although it is not yet clear whether the same groups would be vulnerable to swine flu.

What should I do if I think I [a carer] have swine flu?

If you think you have swine flu following the advice below under 'National Pandemic Flu Service'.

What should I do if I think the person I care for has swine flu?

If the person you care for has a serious underlying health condition and you suspect they may have swine flu then you should contact their GP directly, rather than calling the National Pandemic Flu Service. If they do not have a serious underlying health condition then follow the advice below under 'National Pandemic Flu Service'.

I live with someone who has a serious existing health condition. If I become ill with suspected swine flu should I find somewhere else to stay until I get better?

It is understandable that people who care for others with long-term conditions may be worried about passing on swine flu. But it is important that the virus is not spread further, so we would advise that unless recommended by your doctor or a health professional, you should stay at home.

In order to help prevent passing on the virus to those you live with it is vital that you maintain a good level of hygiene:

- Reduce the risk of catching or spreading swine flu by always covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, then dispose of in the bin.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water.
- Clean hard surfaces, such as door handles, often and thoroughly using hot soapy water then rinse and dry thoroughly.
- Alcohol handrubs are also handy when there is no easy access to a place to wash and dry your hands.

It would also be advisable, if possible, not to sleep in the same room/bed as the person with the long-term health problems, to avoid spreading the illness. Trying to avoid spending time in a room together is also advisable, if possible.

Likewise, try to keep your distance from each other and avoid direct contact, if possible.

National Pandemic Flu Service

Launched on 23 July 2009, the National Pandemic Flu Service is a self-care service which gives people with pandemic swine flu symptoms fast access to antivirals.

It has helped to support GPs, allowing them to deal with other illnesses that need their urgent attention.

People can contact the service through a website www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu, phoneline 0800 1 513 100 or Textphone 0800 1 513 200.

People who have swine flu symptoms are given a unique access number and told where their nearest antiviral collection point is.

They should then ask their flu friend – a friend or relative who doesn't have swine flu – to go and pick up their antiviral.

The flu friend must show their own ID as well as that of the patient. Examples of ID includes:

- A recent utility bill
- Passport
- Credit or debit card
- Driving licence
- NHS card

Anyone who suspects they have swine flu should **not** go to their GP or A&E.

People should contact their doctor direct rather than using the National Pandemic Flu Service if:

- **They have a serious underlying illness**
- They are pregnant
- They have a sick child under one year old
- Their condition suddenly gets much worse
- If their condition is still getting worse after 7 days (5 for a child)

It must be stressed that, for the vast majority of people, swine flu has been mild. Some people find that they get better by staying in bed, drinking plenty of water and taking over the counter flu medication.

People who don't have symptoms and just want information should call 0800 1 513 513.

All about antivirals (Tamiflu and Relenza)

People will only receive antivirals once. To prevent duplication the details of both patient and flu friend are recorded.

Please do not go straight to an antiviral collection point without following the procedure outlined above under 'National Pandemic Flu Service'. The collection points are there to provide medication only to those who have been assessed as having suspected swine flu. They operate on a strict system which means that only those flu friends who present a unique code number from the National Pandemic Flu Service or their GP will be able to pick up antivirals.

Tamiflu and Relenza are not vaccines and will not prevent swine flu. They may decrease the length of time a person is ill.

It is important to stress that most illnesses are not swine flu and that many people will be catching the usual coughs, colds and summer viruses that circulate every year. People should deal with them as they would normally and only contact the National Pandemic Flu Service or their GP if they have a high temperature and definite flu symptoms.

There are enough antivirals for everyone in the UK to get one dose. Like many medicines nausea is a known side effect of Tamiflu in a small number of cases. Symptoms may lessen over the course of the treatment. It may help to take Tamiflu either with or immediately after food, and drinking some water may also lessen any feelings of nausea.

Planning for emergencies

What are 'flu friends'?

The NHS is urging people to find themselves a 'flu friend' as part of plans to prepare. Although symptoms will be mild for the majority of people who contract the virus, the advice is to stay at home to prevent it spreading.

The flu friend could be a member of the family, a neighbour or a friend. They could be asked to pick up medicine or do essential food shopping.

People are also being asked to consider becoming a flu friend to a vulnerable person, such as an older person or others who may live alone.

Flu friends are absolutely vital for people caring for others, should the carer become ill.

I look after someone who is very ill or disabled. What if I become too ill to care for them?

As a carer, it makes sense to begin planning for an emergency as soon as possible. The best way to get help with planning for a caring emergency is to arrange to have a carer's assessment done by your local authority (see more details below).

If you have time you may be able to arrange for formal respite care, but you may want to talk to friends, neighbours and relatives about forming a network of flu friends who can help out and look after you if you are ill.

If you employ someone else to help you with your caring tasks, or so you can have a break, that person may also be affected by flu. Other relatives or friends may also get flu, and may not be able to help you. You may even feel you need to look after them while they are ill.

It is very important that you prepare in advance for these possibilities.

If you provide a regular and substantial amount of care or support for someone, talk to your local authority about having a carer's assessment. If you or the person you care for have already had an assessment and are eligible for local authority support, you may have chosen to receive a Direct Payment or Individual Budget to buy what you need. It is important that your care plan includes arrangements for emergency care.

Your local authority may be able to provide emergency respite care for the person you look after until you are well again, but you should discuss with them how and when this would happen. During a flu pandemic emergency respite care will probably be more difficult to organise.

A flu pandemic means that hospitals have to deal with more patients than usual, so people who under normal circumstances would be cared for in hospital will have to be looked after at home.

As part of your preparations, think about the following:

- What will you do if you get flu?
- What will you do if the person you care for gets flu?
- What will you do if your regular home help, nurse or other carer cannot come to work?
- What will you do if the person you care for uses a day centre and it closes?

Ask your local authority if there are any aids or equipment they can provide or that you can buy to help you manage more easily with your caring role.

Ask friends, families or neighbours if they will act as flu friends and temporary carers should you become ill.

Help with emergency planning

All carers have a legal right to an assessment, carried out by the social services department of the local authority of the person you look after (or someone acting on its behalf). If you haven't had an assessment, ask for one: it can give you access to further help.

To arrange a carers assessment from Lancashire County Council call 0845 053 0009.

When you have the assessment, ensure that it covers what would happen in an emergency. This should come up automatically but it may not, so be prepared to ask. If you've already had a carer's assessment and planning for an emergency was not covered, you can ask the local authority to look at your assessment again and put this right. You can find contact details for your local authority at www.nhs.uk.

If you provide care for someone with a mental health problem under the care programme approach, there should be a written care plan that includes unexpected events. If you provide regular and substantial care for a person on the care programme approach, you should have your own written care plan. This should include what action to take in specific, defined circumstances.

The social worker involved in your carer's assessment should be able to help you with planning and they will probably be the first person you discuss this with.

In order to create an emergency plan that fits your needs, you will need to know:

- The name, address and any other contact details of the person you look after.
- Details of who you and the person you look after would like to be contacted in an emergency. This could be friends, family or professional people involved in the person's care.
- Details of any medication the person is taking.
- Details of any ongoing treatment they need.

You can register with a Carers emergency scheme in your area. If you do, a skilled worker, trained to look at your individual situation, may be able to help you make your emergency plans.

Taking care of the carer

Being a carer is hard work, but you need to look after yourself. There are so many demands on your time every day that it can be difficult to find time for yourself. That stress can build up, so looking after yourself is important when you're a carer. Keeping well reduces the risk of you being unable to look after someone due to a problem with your own health.

But no one can plan for every eventuality, and we all get ill sometimes. Here are some ideas for keeping well and positive steps that carers can take to look after their own needs.

Healthy diet

Eating well is a vital part of looking after yourself. A balanced diet includes at least five different portions of fruit and vegetables a day. These can be fresh, frozen and tinned.

Starchy foods such as bread, cereals, potatoes, pasta and rice are also vital. About a third of your diet should consist of starchy foods. Choose wholegrain bread or cereal as these are higher in fibre and nutrients such as B vitamins, calcium and iron.

Cut back on salt and sugar. The same goes for saturated fats and 'trans fats'. They can push up your cholesterol level and increase your risk of heart disease. Unsaturated fats, on the other hand, can reduce your cholesterol levels and provide you with essential fatty acids.

Exercise

Exercise is vital for your physical and mental health. It helps you deal with stress and makes you feel better emotionally. Physical activity also helps to make your heart stronger, keeps you supple, and reduces all sorts of health risks. Walking, swimming, housework, gardening and even walking upstairs can make a difference.

Ideally, you should take 30 minutes of moderate exercise five or more days a week. That means you should feel warmer and breathe more heavily than usual. If you haven't taken any exercise recently, build up slowly. And if you have any existing health problems, ask your GP for advice before you start.

Sleep

If you're looking after someone who needs a lot of care, are combining caring with a job, or are feeling depressed, you probably aren't getting enough sleep. This in turn can make it harder to cope, and it can further affect your mental health. If you're having trouble sleeping, try to take some exercise during the day, as this can help. Relaxation exercises can also help. Sit comfortably in a quiet place, close your eyes and concentrate on breathing slowly and deeply. As you breathe, tense and then relax each part of your body in turn until you have gone from your toes to your head.

If you can't sleep because the person you care for wakes you, you may need to get extra help. Talk to the local authority of the person you're looking after, and it will either assess your needs and the needs of the person you're caring for, or look again at any assessments that have been done in the past.

Tell people

If you are struggling to manage, are feeling isolated or down, let your family and friends know.

A break from caring

Your main obstacle to looking after yourself may well be finding the time to exercise, think about your diet or have some time to yourself. If you're unable to leave the person you care for unattended, you will need to organise some alternative care for them. See www.nhs.uk for more information on this or call Carers Direct on 0808 802 0202.

More information

1. Carers Direct

This is a free, confidential advice line provided by the NHS for carers. Call the helpline on 0808 802 0202 or email CarersDirect@nhschoices.nhs.uk. Lines are open 8am to 9pm Monday to Friday, 11am to 4pm at weekends. Calls are free from UK landlines.

2. The NHS Choices website has regular updates: www.nhs.uk

This includes:

- The latest official advice
- How to protect yourself and others
- Flu symptom checker
- Questions and answers

3. Contact the National Pandemic Flu Service

www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu

Information 0800 1 513 513

Treatment 0800 1 513 100

Textphone 0800 1 513 200

Download the public information leaflet <http://tinyurl.com/oa8b83>

4. NHS Central Lancashire website: www.centrallancashire.nhs.uk

This includes:

- Latest local news
- Information about flu friends
- A useful form that people can print off to keep by their phone in the event they become unwell
- Other resources

5. To arrange a carers assessment from Lancashire County Council call 0845 053 0009.



Preston Carers Centre
28 Church Street
Preston PR1 3BQ

Tel: 01772 200173
Email: info@prestoncarers.org.uk
Web: www.prestoncarers.org.uk

Preston Carers Centre would like to thank **NHS Central Lancashire** for providing this invaluable swine flu advice for Carers.

We must point out that the Government have decided that Carers are not a priority for vaccination against swine flu but health and social care workers are a priority. This vaccination should be available from late October 2009.

Carers are a priority group for seasonal flu vaccination subject to availability of supplies at their GP's surgery.

For further information on Carers and swine flu vaccination see **www.doh.gov.uk** Carers UK have objected to the exclusion of Carers from swine flu vaccination see **www.carersuk.org** The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Crossroads have also written to the Department of Health re exclusion of Carers from swine flu vaccination see **www.carers.org.uk** and **www.carersblog.wordpress.com**.

We must point out that entitlement to a Carers Assessment is not an entitlement to services and many Carers have found the Peace of Mind 4 Carers provides the vital support and reassurance in an emergency.



Peace of Mind 4 Carers

An emergency support service providing reassurance for Carers and Young Carers.

What is it?

A service providing up to 72 hours of emergency care in the home appropriate for the person in need of care.

What is an emergency?

It is an unplanned event that prevents the Carer from providing care that puts the person you care for at risk.

How will the service work?

In partnership with Preston Carers Centre and the Carer, plans for emergency care arrangements will be put in place and registered with a 24/7 contact support service.

The Carer will carry a special identification card so if an emergency occurs the plan will be activated.

No charge will be made for this service.

Please contact:
Liz Schofield,
Carers Support Officer (Emergency Planning)
at Preston Carers Centre,
28 Church Street,
Preston PR1 3BQ
Telephone: **01772 200173**
Email: **liz@prestoncarers.org.uk**



Preston Carers Centre is supported by:-

