

# Talking to Your Children About the Flu

Children may be fearful about the latest flu outbreak – officially known as H1N1, although many are calling it “swine flu.”

No matter what it’s called, however, with some schools closing and lots of talk about the flu, panic could ensue amid rumors. Even more, if teachers and parents appear panicked, that could lead children to believe the situation is worse than it is.

In instances like these, we adults forget that children can pick up on our fears and hear conversations among us that are filled with our own speculations. A child can mix up real fear and make-believe fear. This is normal, but he or she will need your help to separate the facts from fiction.

Talking to your child about a flu outbreak or any hazard is helpful in preventing fear and in reducing the risk of infecting others.

## What you can do

- Be sure to get the facts from reputable sources, preferably reliable research rather than rumors and guesswork.
- Explain what the flu is and dispel the myths that your child could catch this particular strain of the flu from being around pigs or eating pork.
- Talk to your children about the flu and what your family can do to try to stay healthy.
- Assure your children that you will work together to prevent family members from catching the flu. Involve your children in the strategies to keep everyone safe – basing the level of involvement on what is appropriate for each child’s age.
- Help your child talk about his or her fears regarding the flu outbreak.
- Let your children know it is okay to be afraid.
- Minimize your children’s exposure to television reports about the flu.
- Talk, explain and listen to your children, over and over as necessary.

## Keep working to make things better

- Show your children how to wash their hands thoroughly.
- Show your children how to cover their mouths and noses with a tissue when they cough or sneeze. Also teach them what to do if there is not a tissue immediately available – how to trap the sneeze or cough with the inside of the elbow or with cupped hands covering nose and mouth. Encourage them to throw away a tissue after using it once and to wash hands after sneezing into them. (Trapping a sneeze or cough inside the elbow avoids the danger of passing germs along through hand-to-hand contact when you are not able to wash hands immediately.)
- Remind your children to cover their mouths and noses every time they cough or sneeze.
- Remind your children to wash their hands before meals, after going to the bathroom and when they come in from playing outside.

## Helping your children

- Praise your children when they wash their hands or cover their mouths after coughing or sneezing.
- Don’t yell at or spank your children if they forget these practices; gently remind them.
- Tell your children a story about something good that happened each day.

For additional information visit:

[www.lsuagcenter.com](http://www.lsuagcenter.com)

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