
FACTSHEET

August 21, 2009

Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport
Ministry of Health Services
Ministry of Education

HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH H1N1-RELATED STRESS

Teachers and parents may notice changes in the behaviour of children that could indicate kids are afraid or having a hard time coping with recent news regarding the H1N1 flu virus. Children may not be able to explain how they are feeling and may not notice any differences in how they are behaving. Developed by the Province's Disaster Psychosocial Project, listed below are some behaviours teachers and parents might observe if children become stressed.

Elementary Students (ages 4-12)

- Emotions such as feeling more afraid, scared or sad
- Feeling anxious, tense, upset or having a stomach ache or headache
- Excessive preoccupation with getting the flu and asking for reassurance from parents or teachers
- Clinging to parents/caregivers and having trouble separating at school

Junior – Senior High School Students (ages 13-18)

- Emotions such as being scared, irritable or sad
- Worrying and having concerns that they might get sick or family and friends might become ill
- Thinking about what might happen in Canada and the world
- Feeling anxious, tense, upset or impatient
- Having physical complaints of a stomach ache or headache
- Excessive preoccupation with getting the flu, including reading internet and news articles about the flu, checking with parents/teachers around symptoms and requesting to leave school
- Behaviour changes such as becoming more easily frustrated, quicker to lose their temper and being less compliant with daily routine and requests

Parents and teachers may want to try some of the following suggestions to help children cope with the feelings and behaviours they are experiencing:

- Acknowledge children's fears
- Allow a limited time for discussion if appropriate and then proceed with the regular schedule for the day
- Provide reassurance by telling children lots of people are working hard to keep them safe
- Maintain daily routines at home and at school as children and teens thrive on structure
- Be calm and a model of confidence as children learn to cope by watching how the significant adults in their lives cope in times of stress. Young children take their cues from parents/caregivers and other significant adults in their lives as to how scary things are based on parents'/caregivers' reactions.
- Provide information your children/students can understand

- Limit exposure to news stories and images as these are not designed for delivery to children and younger audiences
- Reinforce things children can do to protect themselves such as hand washing and coughing into their sleeve
- Encourage questions

You can call [HealthLink BC](#) at 8-1-1, 24 hours a day/seven days a week to speak to a nurse if you have more questions or are concerned about any illness/symptoms experienced by you or your children.

For the latest facts on the H1N1 flu virus, including back-to-school information, visit www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1.

