

Psychosocial Considerations - Appendix 5

INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

- **FEMA Continuity of Operations Pandemic Influenza Guidance and Template Instructions**
- **Phase-Specific one page flyers on managing stress during an influenza pandemic**

One Page Flyers

Pandemic Alert Phase

Coping with the News of a New Health Risk

Fear of the unknown is common for people of all ages and cultures. Fear and anxiety can become very powerful emotions when health risks are unknown. Many people are beginning to hear about birds and other animals becoming sick in other parts of the world. Even though this may be happening in far away places, the risks can feel close to home. It is important to understand the risks, our emotional reactions, and ways of coping in order to effectively deal with the stress that such situations can cause.

Changes in Our World

Change is constant in our world and can bring different physical and emotional challenges for many people. The current changes in bird and animal health may affect everyone's health or may continue as a bird and animal problem only. But simply knowing of this risk, it is natural and normal for people to experience emotional changes.

Emotional Reactions

We each have different ways of reacting to trying events in our lives. It is quite normal and natural for people to experience stress reactions in ways you may not think of as "physical", for example, you may find that you are:

- Preoccupied with thoughts or interest in health-related news stories
- Unable to concentrate at work or school
- Becoming irritable or tense with people
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Feeling hopeless or depressed
- Feeling more distrustful
- Worrying about your and your family's safety

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Ideas for Coping

Public health officials are closely watching how birds and animals are affected by this new health risk. It is important that you get your news about any health risks from trusted sources of information. Occasional checks for updates in the news can be helpful, but know when to put down the newspaper or turn off the television. Right now there are things that can help you cope with the physical and emotional stresses you may feel due to the changing health news.

- Stay informed, but not preoccupied with the news
- Stay physically and mentally busy
- Keep to your normal daily routines
- Communicate openly with friends and family
- Rely on your normal sources of support
- Follow expert advice for personal and family preparedness
- Reach out for emotional support or professional help if necessary

Changes in our world are inevitable, and as with other changes and challenges, we will work together to meet and overcome them. Understanding and managing your emotions during stressful times is part of any change. If you or someone you know is having difficulty coping with the stress associated with the changing health news, please reach out for help.

A toll-free phone number is available for emotional support at (877) 294-HELP (4357) and for TTY Assistance at (877) 294-4356. You can also find more ideas for coping online at <http://www.disastermentalhealthnj.com>.

Heightened Pandemic Period

Managing the Emotional Challenges of the Influenza Pandemic

The current influenza pandemic has caused serious physical as well as emotional challenges for many individuals and families across the U.S. and around the world. Dealing with the stress of caring for sick loved ones, as well as taking care of oneself can be overwhelming. For those who have lost loved ones during this crisis, the emotional impact of the situation can be even greater.

In order to best help yourself and others around you, it is important that you pay attention to your own feelings and take care of your own emotional needs. (recognize some of the emotional challenges brought on by the pandemic, as well as some ideas about how to cope with those challenges.)

Emotional and Behavioral Reactions

Each individual and family has its own way of reacting, and coping with (the strong emotions triggered by) a serious illness or death in the family. (Some of the more common reactions experienced during an outbreak like the current pandemic include) these are normal reactions:

- Physical aches and pain unrelated to the illness
- (Extreme) fear, panic and dread
- Inability to focus on work or school (trouble concentrating)

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- Helplessness and/or hopelessness
- Depression (Inability to engage in productive activity)
- (Acute) grief and sadness
- Disorientation (feeling dazed, memory loss,
- inability to recall events of the past 24 hours or understand what is happening) and confusion
- Overwhelmed with self-doubt and uncertainty (Feeling overwhelmed)

Coping

During the peak of a disease outbreak, life can change in many ways. Remaining flexible is important. It may also be helpful to:

- Find alternative ways to do normal activities if isolation is necessary
- Explore alternative means of communicating Stay connected (e.g. phone, e-mail) with loved ones if separated
- Learn and use relaxation techniques that can help calm your mind and body
- Talk and share your feelings with others
- Find comfort in your spiritual and personal beliefs

Helping Children

There are a number of useful ideas that can help parents and caregivers in dealing with their children's emotional response to this phase of the pandemic. These include:

- Provide only age-appropriate information to children (Respond to questions in terms they can comprehend.)
- Be honest, but don't vent your frustrations or overwhelm the child
- Provide children with opportunities to talk about what they are seeing or hearing in the news and the community
- Provide play experiences to help relieve tension. Younger children in particular may find it easier to share their ideas and feelings about the event through non-verbal activities such as drawing.
- Don't be afraid to admit that you can't answer all of their questions
- Allow children to discuss other fears and concerns about unrelated issues
- Monitor children's television viewing. Limit your child's exposure to graphic or troubling scenes. Watch news reports with your child so that you are available to answer their questions and to monitor their reactions
- Keep regular schedules for activities such as eating, playing and going to bed to help restore a sense of security and normalcy.

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You're Not Alone

Contagious diseases often prevent people from having close contact with friends and neighbors. During this difficult time, it is important to remember that you are not alone. Assistance in coping with the emotional challenges of the pandemic is available from many sources.

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Pandemic Period

The Emotional Impact of the Influenza Pandemic

The current influenza pandemic has resulted in serious illness and many flu-related deaths. Many families are experiencing the loss of one or more loved ones. Many of these losses feel very unfair, since young people, as well as the old or sick die from the flu. Stress and grief reactions are *normal* aspects of the emotional process in such situations. These reactions often include:

Physical reactions, such as:

- Fatigue
- General malaise and tiredness
- Susceptibility to illness (all which may easily be confused with early symptoms of influenza)

Emotional disruption –

- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Guilt and shame
- Feeling isolated and alien from others

Changes in thinking –

- Impaired concentration
- Problems with short-term memory
- Disrupted problem-solving abilities

In general, many individuals and families will experience a sense of physical and emotional exhaustion.

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When a loved one dies

A pandemic disease does not discriminate. It can take the life of the young and the old, the healthy and the sick, the rich and the poor. When a loved one dies, common reactions include:

- Feeling confused, numb, disbelief, bewildered, or lost
- Feeling angry at the person who died or at the people considered responsible for the death
- Strong physical reactions, such as nausea, fatigue, shakiness, and muscle weakness
- Intense emotions, such as extreme sadness, anger or fear
- Increased risk for physical injury or illness

Coping with grief and loss: What helps

There are several useful approaches to managing the powerful emotional reactions that can follow the serious illness or death of a loved one. These include:

- Talking to another person for support or spending time with others
- Engaging in positive distracting activities (hobbies, reading, etc.)
- Getting adequate rest and eating healthy meals
- Exercising in moderation
- Trying to maintain a normal schedule
- Focusing on something practical that you can do right now to manage the situation better
- Using relaxation methods (breathing exercises, meditation, calming self-talk, soothing music, etc.)
- Keeping a journal
- Seeking counseling

You're Not Alone

These powerful emotional reactions can further isolate us from others. During this difficult time, it is important to remember that you are not alone. Assistance in coping with the emotional challenges of the pandemic is available from many sources.

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Handout for Community Mental Health Agencies and Counselors

Coping with Fears about Avian Influenza

Local residents struggle to deal with emotions triggered by new health risk

For Additional Information Contact:

New Jersey Department of Human Services

Division of Mental Health Services

Disaster and Terrorism Branch

Trenton, New Jersey

609-777-0728

www.disastermentalhealthnj.com

Trenton, NJ - Across the entire country and all around New Jersey, people are beginning to hear about birds and other animals becoming sick with avian influenza. Even though this disease occurs primarily in migratory birds and poultry; it has raised fears of a possible flu outbreak in humans. Public health officials are closely watching how birds and animals are affected by this illness. Many New Jersey residents are expressing fears about contracting the disease and have been reaching out to medical professionals and others to learn more about the risk. Health care and mental health experts say that during times of uncertainty about a new disease, it is important to understand the risks, emotional reactions, and ways of dealing with the stress that such situations can cause.

The current changes in bird and animal health may affect everyone's health or may continue as a bird and animal problem only. When faced with the frightening news about a health risk, it is natural and normal for people to experience emotional changes. The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services and Department of Human Services-Division of Mental Health Services have partnered to help New Jersey residents manage the emotional challenges related to avian influenza.

Health care and mental health experts agree that everyone has different ways of reacting to trying events such as health risks. It is quite normal and natural for people to experience stress reactions in both physical and emotional ways. Experts explain that these reactions can include:

- Preoccupation with thoughts or interest in health-related news stories
- Inability to concentrate at work or school
- Irritability with others
- Sleeping difficulties
- Depression or feelings of hopelessness
- Feelings of distrust
- Worry about personal and family safety

There are many ways to deal with fear and anxiety about avian influenza. One way is by keeping up with the news. It is important that news about any health risks comes from credible sources of health care information. Occasional checks for updates in the news can be helpful, but it is also important to know when to put down

the newspaper or turn off the television. Right now there are things that can help people cope with the physical and emotional stresses related to the changing news about avian influenza. These include:

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- Staying informed, but not overly preoccupied with the news
- Staying physically and mentally busy
- Keeping to your normal daily routines
- Communicating openly with friends and family
- Relying on your normal sources of support
- Following expert advice for personal and family preparedness
- Reaching out for emotional support or professional help if necessary

Health care experts explain that understanding and managing fear and anxiety when a new illness emerges is an important part of fighting the disease. For people experiencing difficulty coping with the stress associated with the changing health news, a toll-free phone number is available for emotional support. Trained crisis counselors are available at (877) 294-HELP (4357) or for TTY assistance at (877) 294-4356. The Division of Mental Health Services-Disaster and Terrorism Branch has more information and ideas for coping online at <http://www.disastermentalhealthnj.com>.

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Press Template

Coping with Fears about Avian Influenza

How to deal with emotions triggered by new health risk

For Additional Information Contact:

New Jersey Department of Human Services

Division of Mental Health Services

Disaster and Terrorism Branch

Trenton, New Jersey

609-777-0728

www.disastermentalhealthnj.com

Trenton, NJ - As we enter “flu season,” people across the country and around New Jersey are beginning to hear about birds and other animals becoming sick with avian influenza. Even though this disease occurs primarily in migratory birds and poultry; it has raised fears of a possible flu outbreak in humans. Public health officials are closely watching how birds and animals are affected by this illness.

Because many New Jersey residents fear that they might contract the disease and want to learn more about the risk, both health care and mental health care experts stress that “knowledge is power.” They say that during times of uncertainty about a new disease, it is important not only to follow healthcare directives and activities, but also to understand the risks, emotional reactions, and ways of dealing with the stress caused by such situations.

The current changes in bird and animal health may affect everyone’s health...or may merely continue as a bird and animal problem only.

If avian flu does become a frightening health risk, it will be natural and normal for people to experience emotional changes. To help New Jersey residents manage the emotional challenges related to avian influenza, the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services and Department of Human Services-Division of Mental Health Services have partnered to develop some simple suggestions for coping with this potential health hazard.

Health care and mental health experts agree that while everyone has different ways of reacting to events such as health risks, there are a number of quite normal and natural reactions that people can experience in both physical and emotional ways, such as:

- Preoccupation with thoughts or interest in health-related news stories
- Inability to concentrate at work or school
- Irritability with others
- Sleeping difficulties
- Overeating or turning to other substances for comfort
- Depression or feelings of hopelessness

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- Feelings of distrust
- Worry about personal and family safety

There are many ways to deal with fear and anxiety about avian influenza. One way is to keep up with the news; but make sure to get news about any health risks from credible sources of health care information.

Occasional checks for updates in the news can be helpful; but it is also important to know when to put down the newspaper or turn off the television. Here are some immediate ways to help people cope with the physical and emotional stresses related to the changing news about avian influenza. You should:

- Stay informed, but do not become overly preoccupied with the news
- Stay physically and mentally busy
- Keep to your normal daily routines
- Maintain healthy practices of a good diet, cleanliness, and exercise
- Get plenty of sleep and set aside times for relaxation
- Communicate openly with friends and family
- Rely on your normal sources of support
- Follow expert advice for personal and family preparedness
- Reach out for emotional support or professional help if necessary

Remember... an important part of fighting the disease is learning how to understand and manage anxiety when a new illness emerges. Movies may show throngs of people panicking in the streets or storming into places of safety... but in real life, that is not the healthy approach to handling any public health situation.

For people experiencing difficulty coping with the stress associated with the changing health news, a toll-free phone number is available for emotional support. Trained crisis counselors are available at (877) 294-HELP (4357) or for TTY assistance at (877) 294-4356. The Division of Mental Health Services-Disaster and Terrorism Branch has more information and ideas for coping online at <http://www.disastermentalhealthnj.com>.

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