

# ABCs

FOR PARENTS

## Helping your child stay healthy and happy during a flu outbreak



<b>A</b>	<b>ASK</b> your children what they have heard about the flu, and what they're thinking. Kids hear a lot of scary stuff about the flu. Be <b>AVAILABLE</b> . Listen calmly. Spend time.
<b>B</b>	<b>BE</b> prepared to hear a mixture of information – there is a lot of confusion out there. Don't ignore or minimize kids concerns or blame them for wrong information. <b>BE</b> ready with simple, age-appropriate information. <b>BE</b> reassuring. <b>BE</b> there.
<b>C</b>	<b>COMFORT</b> your children by letting them know how you (and doctors) are prepared to <b>CARE</b> for them. Tell them how our President and other world leaders have asked experts all over the world to do all they can to prevent and stop the flu.
<b>D</b>	<b>DON'T</b> overwhelm your children with flu details – most kids just need to know the adults they trust are dealing with it...so they (the kids) can go on with their lives.
<b>E</b>	<b>EXERCISE</b> is important for your children's health – help your kids find at least one healthy activity that requires regular aerobic exercise, and support their efforts! Unless the doctor says otherwise, taking a brisk walk every day (even in cold weather) can be fun and healthy!
<b>F</b>	<b>FIND</b> comfort and strength for <u>yourself</u> in personal and/or spiritual beliefs – it's important that parents have somewhere to turn for renewal. Your children may find comfort in similar beliefs.
<b>G</b>	<b>GET</b> yourself organized with inside learning activities and games – this will prepare you for “at home” days due to sick days or school closings. And you'll be ready for any rainy day!
<b>H</b>	<b>HELP</b> your children know the difference between their allergies or colds and the flu. You don't want them to get worried if they sneeze! Let them know most people who get the flu get help and get better. They especially need to know this because “flu deaths” are reported in the news.
<b>I</b>	<b>IDENTIFY</b> backup plans ahead of time in the event you or children need to remain home due to illness or school closings. This will reduce stress later on by helping you avoid the need for last minute arrangements for you and your family.
<b>J</b>	<b>JOT DOWN</b> family and emergency numbers and tuck a copy in your children's backpack. Knowing where to find mommy or daddy sure makes it easier to go off in the morning. Stick a note or family picture in their lunchboxes, too – it will bring a smile at lunchtime!
<b>K</b>	<b>KNOW</b> what your children's schools are doing regarding flu prevention, and what their friends are saying about it. Talk about school flu prevention activities with your kids. Support and add to school efforts by teaching your children good health habits and providing materials if needed.
<b>L</b>	<b>LEARN</b> what comforts your children, and help them engage in healthy self-soothing behaviors. Falling asleep to soft music? Taking the dog for a quiet walk? Playing the guitar? Shooting a few hoops with Dad? Sitting outside and feeling the sun and soft breeze? Encourage self-caring activities to help your children reduce stress and promote resilience.
<b>M</b>	<b>MAINTAIN</b> a daily routine whenever possible – routines can be comforting for people of all ages, especially when the world is changing around them.
<b>N</b>	<b>NO ONE</b> person or group is to blame for a flu outbreak. But know that your kids may hear negative comments about those who are sick. They may also see fear and disrespect shown to sick people and their families. Be ready to address this and encourage questions and discussion. Report any bullying at school to school authorities. Be a role model for your kids.

<b>O</b>	<b>OFF</b> with the TV during “flu updates” and other bad news. Reports of “flu deaths” are too scary for kids, and too much “flu information” is likely to increase everyone’s worries.
<b>P</b>	<b>PROVIDE</b> healthy meals, and let kids know eating a balanced diet helps keep their bodies healthy and thus makes them less likely to become sick. Nutrition IN helps keep flu OUT.
<b>Q</b>	<b>QUESTION</b> your own fear reactions to the “flu news.” Your children look to you for cues as to how worried they should be. If you think your fears are getting in the way of daily responsibilities, you could benefit from talking with informed and supportive friends or a health care provider.
<b>R</b>	<b>REALIZE</b> your role in nurturing your children’s abilities to identify and discuss their thoughts and feelings. <b>REMEMBER</b> , not all children easily put their concerns into words. Spending some special time together may allow for a “story to come out”. Be patient. Thoughts and feelings can be complex and tricky to express. It is well worth the wait.
<b>S</b>	<b>SELF-CARE SKILLS</b> can last a life-time! Teach your children to care for themselves by balancing their daily life: studying hard, getting enough sleep, planning “down time” each day, having some fun, eating well and exercising. Knowing they are taking actions to promote their good health and prevent infection can give them a sense of control and reduce their worries.
<b>T</b>	<b>TEACH</b> your child good health practices: cover sneezes and coughs, wash hands often, keep hands away from mouths, noses and eyes, stay 6 feet away from people who are sick.
<b>U</b>	<b>UTILIZE</b> simple messages with kids such as “Very few people in the United States have the flu”. “We are doing things every day to stay healthy (e.g. hand washing, eating well and exercising).” “Come talk with me any time you have questions.”
<b>V</b>	<b>VOICE</b> praise when and where kids can “overhear” you! They’ll believe your words even more when they hear you singing their praises to someone else.
<b>W</b>	<b>WATCH</b> for symptoms of “too much stress or <b>WORRY</b> ” – these can show up in little ones as physical problems (stomach aches), and in any age children as changes in behavior, mood, and energy level, or over-reactions to everyday demands. Seek help for your child if you note these symptoms – there is expert help available. Call 2-1-1 for information on what is available.
<b>X</b>	<b>EXAMINE</b> your child’s schedule and adjust it as necessary. A little <b>EXTRA</b> comfort or self-care during the height of flu season can go a long way toward prevention.
<b>Y</b>	<b>SAY YES</b> to giving and receiving ideas and support from other parents. Exchanging ideas can be comforting to all of you.
<b>Z</b>	<b>ZERO IN</b> on what you <u>can</u> do for your kids and know your limits. <i>Remember, you’re only human!</i>

**For more information on helping your children adapt well during stressful times in life, see the following: [10 Tips for Building Resilience in Children and Teens](#).**



**Connecticut  
Department of Mental Health  
and Addiction Services**



Thanks to the  
University of Connecticut Center for  
Trauma Response, Recovery and Preparedness  
in the design of this brochure.  
May 2009

**This publication is available online at <http://ct.gov/dmhas/flu.stress>.**