

A Health Campaign of Uniformed Services University, [www.usuhs.edu](http://www.usuhs.edu), and the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Bethesda, Maryland, [www.CSTSonline.org](http://www.CSTSonline.org)

## PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES: *The Role of the Military Family*

Public health emergencies, such as infectious disease outbreaks, create a call to action for individuals and families to take responsibility for their health. The public is a key partner in addressing public health crises that affect national and international communities.

Because these kinds of health crises impact national security, the health and resilience of our military (its fighting force as well as military families and children) are very important.

Families have a responsibility to protect the health and safety of children of all ages in times of health emergencies

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and disasters.

Flu viruses are extremely unpredictable and variable. While leaders in science, medicine, and government closely monitor and seek to find solutions to disease outbreaks, the best way to protect oneself and one's family is through practicing

common sense, basic hygiene, staying informed, and following recommendations over the course of the crisis. Here are some important tips for your family's health and safety during a public health emergency.

### Basic Hygiene:

Everyday things you and your children need to do to stay healthy:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze (alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective).
- Wash hands after coming home from public places such as a mall, the movies, playgrounds, etc.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread that way.

### Avoid Close Contact with Sick People

- Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.
- If you are sick, it is recommended that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

### Stay Informed

Having a reliable and regular source of information (newspaper, radio, television news, or online website)

is important during a public health crisis. Updated recommendations regarding travel, self and family care, and prevention may impact your planning and that of family members. There are several reliable and well-established sources of information that are updated regularly:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- American Red Cross: [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)
- Your local American Red Cross chapter: <https://www.redcross.org/find-your-local-chapter.html>

### Family Health/Communication

- It is important, even during times of public health crisis, to keep up with your regular health routines, such as annual check-ups.
- Military families are often on the move. If your move coincides with disease outbreak, make sure you have a family doctor or clinic at your new location. Be sure you know of ways to access healthcare along the way to your new destination.
- If you or your family members take regular medications, make sure you have an extra supply on hand.

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- Establish an emergency family communication plan, such as a primary contact and number (preferably a relative or friend in another part of the region or out of state) who family members can call in case of emergencies. Every family member should know this number.
- Have a 'ready to go' kit. Essential items include extra water, food, batteries, first aid kit, a flashlight, wind up radio, contact numbers, and medications.

### **Involve Your Children**

- Schools are a very good source of health information and education. Make sure to read your children's school resources and any specific school recommendations or emergency plans.

- Encourage your children to educate the entire family about health habits that can help during a public emergency.
- Provide extra support to children with special needs during such times to ensure they are protected.
- Remember to plan for childcare in the event of school closure; this may mean taking leave or finding alternate care plans.

Public health emergencies, while of great concern to us all, present opportunities for families to review and practice important steps for good health. It is a time to educate children of all ages about health habits for life. As a military family, your health and the health of loved ones contribute to the health, safety, and security of our country.

*Courage to Care* is a health promotion campaign of Uniformed Services University and its Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS). CSTS is the academic arm and a partnering Center of the Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury.



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