

## Massachusetts Department of Public Health

### Flu: What You Can Do – Caring for People at Home Getting Enough to Drink: Dehydration and the Flu

When people lose more water than they take in, they become dehydrated. Infants and children can become dehydrated more easily than adults because of their smaller size. The elderly and people with some illnesses are also at higher risk.

#### **Signs of Mild or Moderate Dehydration**

- Feeling more thirsty
- Very dry mouth
- Less urination or darker urine
- Slight dizziness or lightheadedness
- Headache

#### **Additional Signs in Babies and Children**

- Being less active
- Fewer tears when crying
- Slightly sunken soft spot on top of a baby's head
- Fewer wet diapers than a child normally has, or the weight of the diapers is less than normal for him or her

#### **How to Prevent and Treat Dehydration**

Provide plenty of water, fruit and vegetable juices, soups and broths, and beverages such as Gatorade® or a store brand (for adults) and Pedialyte® or a store brand (for children). Avoid caffeine and alcohol.

Encourage someone who is sick to drink small amounts of fluid often. Keep an eye on the person who is sick, since dehydration can occur very quickly, especially in young children.

Flu does not usually cause diarrhea in adults, but sometimes can in children. People with diarrhea need fluids that contain the right amount of salt and sugar. Infants or toddlers who breastfeed should continue to do so. For children who are not breastfeeding, Pedialyte®, Ceralyte®, and Oralyte® all contain the right amount of salts and sugar. These are the best fluids to give to children with diarrhea.

## When to Call a Doctor

***Severe dehydration (not having enough fluid in the body) is a medical emergency.*** A person with severe dehydration may need fluids intravenously (through a needle in the arm) in a clinic or hospital. While you are waiting for medical help, continue to offer the person fluids in small amounts often. Get emergency medical care if the person who is sick has any of these symptoms.

- Difficulty breathing
- Extreme fussiness or sleepiness (in infants and children)
- Extreme irritability, decreased alertness, speech changes, confusion, or unconsciousness (in adults and children)
- Muscle weakness and fast heart rate

Call your doctor immediately if the person who is sick has:

- Extreme thirst
- Very dry mouth or inside of nose, or skin does not bounce back to normal if it is gently pinched
- Little or no urination
- Weight loss
- Fast heart rate
- Very low activity level
- Deeply sunken soft spot on top of a baby's head

Watch the person who is sick carefully for signs that dehydration is getting worse. Call your doctor if there are any unusual symptoms that concern you.