

## *“Community Pharmacy Heroes Prevent U.S. Swine Flu Epidemic”*

Imagine that the title of this article was the headline in several U.S. newspapers. Now imagine just how little effort it would take on the part of our Nation’s pharmacists to make this headline a reality.

As many of you know, there has been a recent outbreak of swine flu around the world, with nearly 50 reported cases in the United States at the time of the writing of this article. And with the rapidly increasing number of cases of swine flu internationally, there is a serious concern that this outbreak of swine flu could become a pandemic crisis.

The Center for Disease Control is doing all they can to make citizens aware of how to protect themselves from the spread of virus, as are many news outlets. However, think how much more powerful and effective these efforts could be if pharmacists, in large numbers, jumped in to do their part to keep this outbreak controlled.

It would be hard to argue that pharmacists are not well positioned, within the communities of this nation, to play a bigger role in the public health efforts of our nation’s health care system. Pharmacists are easily accessible, most patients visit the pharmacy at least once a month, and the majority of community pharmacists play the role of patient educator on a daily basis.

So it is not a huge stretch of the imagination that the large workforce of community-embedded pharmacists could easily take on a much larger role to improve the public health of Americans.

We are not talking rocket science, nor pharmaceutical care, or even medication therapy management, we are just talking about pharmacists around the nation providing information to patients to help prevent the continued spread of the virus, and to provide a calming voice for patients who may be extremely worried that the swine flu will hit them next, or that the cough they have is a sure sign that they already have it.

And here are a couple of simple steps that community pharmacists can take to make a small difference that adds up to a huge difference in your communities.

1. Make sure the pharmacy staff washes their hands regularly throughout the day, especially if they are shaking hands with customers or ringing up sales.
2. Clean the pharmacy counter, where patients pick up their prescriptions, regularly throughout the day.
3. Provide a container of hand sanitizer on the pharmacy counter for your patients’ use.
4. Provide a calm and comforting voice for those patients who express concern about the swine flu outbreak
5. Remind patients that hand sanitizers are okay, but regular thorough hand washing throughout the day is the best way to remove any possible virus from their hands.

6. Remind patients to cover their nose or mouth when coughing, and to wash their hands afterward
7. Remind patients to stay home if they have flu symptoms, so they don't spread the flu to others, and to stay home until 2 days after their symptoms go away
8. Remind patients that if they get so sick that they have difficulty breathing, then they should go to the hospital
9. Contact your local public health office to see if there is anything else you could be doing to help the effort to decrease the spread of the swine flu
10. Every year, find a way to increase the number of your patients who get the flu shot

With just these ten easy steps, pharmacists could have a huge impact on limiting the spread of the virus, and could truly become one of the heroes of the health care system. Many of you have previously said that you wanted to become a pharmacist so that you could make a difference. What better way to make a difference in your community than to become more engaged in public health initiatives.

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You all have the power to make this headline a reality!

For more info regarding swine flu go to:

[http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/general\\_info.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/general_info.htm)  
<http://www.ahrq.gov/prep/swineflu.htm>

This opinion piece was written by:

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