

Concern about pandemic flu has positive impact on personal hygiene behaviors

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Fear of the H1N1 virus appears to be the driving factor behind the adoption of preventive behaviors, according to a study published in the June issue of *AJIC: American Journal of Infection Control*, the official publication of the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology, (APIC). Researchers studying the public response during the recent H1N1 outbreak in Hong Kong concluded that fear about the pandemic prompted residents to frequently wash hands and wear face-masks.

A team led by Joseph T.F. Lau, PhD, a professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, investigated the prevalence of self-reported preventive behaviors in response to the influenza A/H1N1 epidemic in Hong Kong, including wearing face-masks regularly in public areas, wearing face-masks after the onset of influenza-like illness (ILI) symptoms, and frequent hand-washing. Previous research shows that both frequent hand-washing and wearing face-masks can control the spread of influenza.

The study's results showed that 47 percent washed hands more than 10 times per day, 89 percent wore face-masks when having influenza-like illness (ILI) and 21.5 percent wore face-masks regularly in public areas.

The authors note that pandemic outbreaks "have had a sustained impact on personal hygiene and protective behaviors. Our study showed that people with a higher level of mental distress due to A/H1N1 were more likely to adopt some of the three preventive measures." They go on to

say that emerging [infectious diseases](#) "provide a window of opportunity for health education to improve personal hygiene."

According to the authors, these preventive behaviors can play an important role in controlling pandemic [influenza](#), but they cautioned that there is a lack of data on their adoption by the public and see a need for more research.

More information: Ref: AJIC 2010; 38[5].

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