

H1N1 Influenza Fall 2009 Update

Concern about the H1N1 flu is increasing as students head back to campus. To date, the highest number of confirmed cases of the flu have been among people 5-24 years old, and colleges may act as a "point of spread." Additionally, the CDC recommends that those who are of higher risk for complications of this flu get the vaccine when it first becomes available. The recommendation includes most traditionally aged college students. Given these facts, the following suggestions may be helpful to those organizations who provide gathering spaces and housing for fraternity and sorority chapters.

Prevention: Staying Healthy and Preventing the Spread of the Flu

Several steps can be taken to keep from getting sick and spreading this virus:

- Students should be encouraged to practice good hand hygiene. They should wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing and sneezing. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Students should practice good respiratory etiquette. The main way flu spreads is from person to person in droplets produced by coughs and sneezes, so it is important they cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when they cough or sneeze. If a tissue is not handy, they should cough into their shoulder or elbow, not their hands.
- Avoid sharing eating and drinking utensils. Sharing cups and glasses is never a good idea, especially during flu season. Drinking games are particularly risky.
- Students should be encouraged to get vaccinated for seasonal flu.

Prevention: Protecting Your Living Space

House Corporation boards can take action to make it less likely for residents to become ill. Some of these steps include:

- Making soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand cleaners readily available.
- Making sure tissues and no-touch wastebaskets are readily available.
- Establishing regular schedules for frequent cleaning of commonly touched surfaces, including: Doorknobs, handrails, tables, telephones, chairs, sofas, bathroom surfaces, and counters and surfaces in dining rooms, computer rooms and meeting rooms.
- Providing disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces can be wiped down prior to each use.
- Encouraging students to frequently clean their living quarters. Students living together should regularly clean frequently used surfaces.

Symptoms

What are the symptoms of seasonal flu and the 2009 H1N1 flu?

Symptoms of flu include fever or chills and cough or sore throat. In addition, symptoms of flu can include runny nose, body aches, headache, tiredness, diarrhea, or vomiting.

How do I recognize a fever or signs of a fever?

A fever is a temperature that is equal to or greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius when taken with a thermometer. Look for these possible signs of fever: if he or she feels very warm, has a flushed appearance, or is sweating or shivering.

How do I know if someone has 2009 H1N1 flu or seasonal flu?

It will be very hard to tell if someone who is sick has 2009 H1N1 flu or seasonal flu. Public health officials and medical authorities will not be recommending laboratory tests. Anyone who has the symptoms of flu-like illness should stay home and not go to work.

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What fever-reducing medications can students, faculty, and staff take when sick?

Fever-reducing medications are medicines that contain acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen (such as Motrin). These medicines can be given to people who are sick with flu to help bring their fever down and relieve their pain.

What to do if a member is infected?**Facilitate self-isolation of residential students with flu-like illness**

Those with flu-like illness should stay away from classes and limit interactions with other people, except to seek medical care, for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines. Some people with influenza will not have fever; therefore, absence of fever does not mean absence of infection. They should stay away from others during this time period even if they are taking antiviral drugs for treatment of the flu.

- If possible, residential students with flu-like illness who live relatively close to the campus should return to their home to keep from making others sick. These students should be instructed to do so in a way that limits contact with others as much as possible. For example, travel by private car or taxi would be preferable over use of public transportation.
- Students with a private room should remain in their room and receive care and meals from a single person. Students can establish a “flu buddy scheme” in which students pair up to care for each other if one or the other becomes ill. If possible, healthy roommates should be provided alternative accommodations.
- If close contact with others cannot be avoided, the ill student should be asked to wear a surgical mask during the period of contact. Examples of close contact include kissing, sharing eating or drinking utensils, or having any other contact between persons likely to result in exposure to respiratory droplets.
- Instruct students with flu-like illness to promptly seek medical attention if they have a medical condition that puts them at increased risk of severe illness from flu, are concerned about their illness, or develop severe symptoms such as increased fever, shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure, or rapid breathing.

Promote self-isolation at home by non-resident students, faculty, and staff

Non-residential members with flu-like illness should be asked to self-isolate at home or at a friend’s or family member’s home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines.

At a press conference announcing CDC recommendations for institutions of higher education, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan was quoted. “We can all work to keep ourselves healthy now by practicing prevention, close monitoring, and using common sense,” he said. “We know that some students may be affected by H1N1. Our top priority is making sure that they have a way to get well, stay well, and keep learning.”

For more information, please go to www.flu.gov, a website created by the Department of Health & Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.