

H1N1 influenza update (9/3/09)

by Chancellor Richard H. Wells - Thursday, September 03, 2009

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/2166/h1n1-influenza-update/>

Since the first cases of the H1N1 influenza virus were identified last April, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has continued to track and monitor the infection pattern of the virus. While the most recent information from health officials indicates no immediate health emergency, the CDC is projecting an increase in H1N1 cases this fall and early winter.

Of particular concern, according to the CDC, are schools and colleges — because the viral nature of H1N1 is proving to be more infectious in young adults than the typical seasonal flu pattern.

What we can do

As a campus community, we will continue to place the health and safety of our students, faculty, staff and visitors as a top priority as we also continue to deliver our educational mission. We must continue to work together to ensure that each of us practices the health and safety guidelines outlined by the CDC to limit the spread of H1N1 (www.cdc.gov/H1N1FLU). The UW Oshkosh Student Health Center (www.uwosh.edu/health_center), the CDC and the Wisconsin Pandemic Flu Resource Office (<http://pandemic.wisconsin.gov>) advise the following to prevent spread of the virus:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after use.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners also are effective. Hand washing is the best practice.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth to reduce the potential spread of viruses, such as influenza.
- Try to avoid close contact with individuals who are ill.

Proactive planning

We will continue to closely monitor the situation and provide campus updates via the university H1N1 Web site (www.uwosh.edu/home/h1n1) about how we, as a campus community, can work together to limit the spread of the virus on our campus. We also are monitoring the development and availability of H1N1 vaccines and will provide updates as more information becomes available. The University's pandemic response team, established nearly five years ago, continues to monitor the situation as well as provide updates regarding resources and actions necessary.

While almost all those infected by H1N1 recovered within weeks, even a mild case of influenza results in undesirable symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, headache, extreme fatigue and body aches,

and in some severe cases — particularly those with pre-existing medical conditions — hospitalization and death (www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/sick.htm).

The infectious nature of this virus may require a shift in our work culture. Due to the “pandemic potential” of this virus, I can not stress enough that being a responsible employee or student may mean staying home rather than coming to work or class with flu symptoms. As the CDC continues to advise, the H1N1 virus is most infectious during the initial days of illness when one is experiencing cough and fever. To that end, the most responsible action in order to lower the risk of spreading the virus across our community will be to stay at home rather than to report to work or class until fever (<100 degrees) is gone for at least 24 hours.

Large numbers of cases on our campus may have the potential to cause serious disruption to our ability to deliver our mission. With that in mind, I also am asking faculty and supervisors to work with their students and staff to ensure that the health guidelines are implemented. The seriousness of this situation requires faculty and supervisors to practice flexibility related to class and absence policies and work attendance during this potential health situation.

Given the deep commitment of our faculty and academic teaching staff to our students, I know that each of you will do your very best to accommodate our students, including helping them to makeup missed work due to illness as well as encouraging your colleagues to do the same.

Please take the time to review the health guidelines provided by the CDC (www.flu.gov) and campus resources and to read the e-mails and communications related to H1N1 from me and other UW Oshkosh staff as we continue to provide relevant updates.

Vaccines (seasonal flu and H1N1)

Vaccines for the seasonal flu, which requires one shot, for students and employees will be available during the University’s fall seasonal influenza clinic in late September and October. With respect to the H1N1 virus, which requires a series of two vaccinations, we are awaiting the details for the availability the vaccine for students only — to be administered through the University’s Student Health Care Center following the guidelines mandated by public health officials. Faculty and staff interested in receiving the H1N1 vaccination are encouraged to contact their individual or community healthcare provider for details about vaccinations.

As a community, we can work together to reduce our risk by staying informed, following the CDC’s personal hygiene guidelines as well as reviewing the CDC’s pandemic planning checklist for individuals and families (www.pandemicflu.gov/individual/checklist.html).

I thank you for your attention to this community concern. I am confident that as we work together as a caring and professional community, we will address the challenges associated with this virus. Should you have any questions related to the H1N1 virus, please e-mail pandemicresponse@uwosh.edu.

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Chancellor