

July 9, 2009

MEMORANDUM

To: NC State Community



FROM: David Rainer, Associate Vice Chancellor for Environmental Health and Public Safety

SUBJECT: H1N1 Influenza Update

The North Carolina Department of Health and Humans Services has indicated that the novel H1N1 influenza A virus is the predominant virus currently causing flu in North Carolina, and that cases have been reported throughout the United States and internationally. According to Wake County Human Services, cases of H1N1 flu are still being diagnosed even though the traditional flu season ends in late spring. North Carolina State University Student Health Services and Environmental Health and Safety are continuously monitoring the situation in North Carolina, as well as reviewing recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

On June 29, NC State Environmental Health and Safety hosted a meeting with representatives of Wake County Human Services, Student Health Services, and other campus groups to discuss the campus response to H1N1 flu and to receive the latest information.

Since H1N1 influenza is endemic to North Carolina, NC State will no longer notify the campus community of new flu cases, unless there are significant new developments. NC State will update the Student Health and Environmental Health and Public Safety web sites regularly as information becomes available.

For additional information, a list of Frequently Asked Questions is included.

H1N1 Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is H1N1 and why is it in the news?

A: H1N1 is in the news because it is a new strain of influenza A that has not been seen before. It has components of swine, avian, and human flu. When there is a new strain, there can be uncertainty about how severe the illness will be and heightened alert. Even though there have been deaths in the United States and internationally, most cases of H1N1 have been similar to traditional flu or even milder. The term “swine flu” was initially used but has now been replaced by novel H1N1 or H1N1 influenza A. A person does not get this strain of flu by being around pigs or by consuming pork. Flu vaccine commonly received in the fall to protect against traditional flu did not contain protection against this new strain of influenza. This new strain is also of interest because it is occurring in the summer, while traditional flu season is usually October to April.

Q: Have any cases of H1N1 been diagnosed at Student Health?

A: Student Health has confirmed that 4 students were diagnosed with H1N1 in June 2009. More than 40 cases have been diagnosed in Wake County and over 200 in North Carolina, so it would not be unusual for Student Health to diagnose additional cases. H1N1 has also been diagnosed throughout the United States and internationally. In general, a person who attends or works at NC State is at no greater risk of H1N1 infection than individuals in the community.

Q: What are the symptoms of H1N1?

A: Symptoms may include fever over 100 degrees, body aches, headache, fatigue, cough, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, vomiting, and diarrhea. Remember that there are many illnesses that are not the flu that can have similar symptoms, such as the common cold and allergies.

Q: If I am a student and think I have the flu, how can I make a Student Health appointment?

A: Appointments can be made by calling (919) 515-7107 during weekday business hours or by booking on line at healthweb.ncsu.edu. Try to arrange the appointment within 48 hours of symptoms because anti-viral prescription medication is most effective if taken within 48 hours of symptoms starting.

Q: How does a person get exposed to the flu?

A: Flu is commonly spread in 2 ways:

- Direct person-to-person contact
 - Close contact, such as kissing or sharing a drink.

- Through the air when a sick person coughs or sneezes into the air and infectious droplets land in the nose or mouth of a well person. (Droplets can travel as far as 6 feet after a cough or sneeze.)
- Indirect contact when a well person touches something that is contaminated with infectious droplets and then brings hands to nose, mouth, or eyes. (Flu virus can survive minutes to hours on surfaces.)

Q: What is the incubation period?

A: Incubation period from exposure to symptoms is thought to be 1-7 days.

Q: How long is a person considered contagious with the flu?

A: A person is considered contagious (able to pass the infection on to others) a day before symptoms start and for about 7 days after symptoms begin. In general, the recommendation for the sick person is that they self-isolate and avoid exposure to others for at least 7 days after symptoms begin or for 24 hours after the last symptom resolves, whichever is longest.

Q: If I am well, how do I keep from getting the flu?

A: In general, flu prevention might include:

- Stay away from sick people.
- Do not share drinks, cigarettes, utensils, or other personal items, such as lipstick.
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.
- If possible, avoid shaking hands when greeting people.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Pay special attention to cleaning hands after being out in public and touching common items, such as ATM, door knobs, money, and grocery carts.
- Stay informed about the flu and follow any public health recommendations regarding school closures, avoiding crowds, and other social distancing measures.
- Contact your healthcare provider if you have a known or suspected exposure to flu for recommendations about whether to consider prophylactic anti-viral medication.

Q: How is H1N1 flu diagnosed?

A: Flu is sometimes diagnosed based on symptoms and exam without any testing and is treated as “probable” flu.

A swab is sometimes inserted into the nose and the specimen analyzed with a rapid flu test. The test takes minutes and can distinguish influenza A and B. The rapid flu test might be positive for A during H1N1 infection since H1N1 is a kind of influenza A, but there is no guarantee from the manufacturer that the rapid flu test will detect H1N1 because it is a new

strain. Specialized testing to detect H1N1 is sometimes sent to State Lab, and results may take a day or several days.

Q: How is H1N1 treated?

A: Treatment of the flu often depends on the severity of symptoms. Those with mild symptoms often recover without seeing a medical provider at all and often treat with rest and over-the-counter medications for symptoms. Those with more severe symptoms might visit their medical provider, have testing, and take over-the-counter medications for symptoms, in addition to a prescription anti-viral medication.

In general, flu treatment might include:

- Get a proper diagnosis. Many illnesses that are not flu can have symptoms similar to flu.
- Get extra rest and extra fluids.
- Follow your medical provider's recommendations about self-isolation. You likely will be told to avoid exposing others for a minimum of 7 days after the first symptom or for 24 hours after the last symptom resolves, whichever is longest.
- Monitor temperature and treat fever.
- Over-the-counter medications can be helpful for fever, sore throat, and cough.
- Prescription anti-viral medications, such as Tamiflu (a pill) or Relenza (an inhaled medication) are sometimes given and can be effective at shortening the course of H1N1 if given within 48 hours of symptoms.
- Mild flu cases might be treated with over-the-counter medications and not require anti-viral prescriptions.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or cough or sneeze into your sleeve if you have no tissue.
- Discard tissue after using.
- Frequently wash your contaminated hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Frequently decontaminate surfaces in your household, especially items that might be touched by others (refrigerator handle, remote control, computer keyboard).
- Bleach-containing cleaners, Lysol, and alcohol-based sanitizers are just some of the products that can decontaminate surfaces.

Q: I am a student and have been diagnosed with the flu (H1N1). What should I do about being around others?

A: If you visited Student Health Services and had symptoms suspicious for flu or a positive rapid flu test, you were likely told to self-isolate away from school, work, or exposing others immediately (for a minimum of 7 days after the onset of symptoms or for 24 hours after the last symptom goes away, whichever is longest), even though specialized test results that confirm the diagnosis of H1N1 might not be available for days.

You were likely asked questions to determine close personal contacts and were advised to notify those individuals of your diagnosis so they can monitor themselves for symptoms or contact their medical provider for advice about whether an anti-viral prescription to prevent the flu is warranted.

Q: I am a student with H1N1 and have been told to stay away from class and work for at least 7 days. What do I do about notifying my instructors and keeping up with school and about notifying my employer?

A: Students should notify instructors about the need to miss class for medical reasons and that they will likely be out for at least 7 days or more. Notify the instructor by phone or e-mail rather than visiting the instructor and risking exposure of the instructor to the flu virus.

You may find that you are too ill to be productive academically while you are resting away from school. Communicate with the instructor to see if the course content, assignments, and tests that were missed can reasonably be made up or whether an incomplete or medical drop may be necessary.

Q: If I am a student with the diagnosis of H1N1 and have roommates, what should I do so my roommates will not catch the flu?

A: Because of variability in housing situations (square footage, shared spaces versus non-shared spaces, and number of roommates), it is difficult to give a comprehensive answer. In general, a sick student who shares housing with other individuals should do whatever can be reasonably done to lessen exposure of roommates who are well.

Remember that infectious droplets can travel at least 6 feet from a cough or sneeze and land on a well person or land on surfaces in a room.

If a sick person shares a small space with a roommate and will frequently be within 6 feet of a well person, the well person may be at increased risk of exposure to flu. Risk can be lessened if the sick or well person leaves for 7 or more days and stays at alternative housing. If either party leaving temporarily is not an option, the well person might contact a medical provider and take a prophylactic anti-viral medication to prevent the flu. Also, the sick person can wear a mask to avoid spread of droplets through coughing or sneezing. The sick and well person should both observe frequent washing of hands or use of hand sanitizer and frequent decontamination of surfaces that are commonly touched.

Sick students who have family living within a reasonable distance from Raleigh sometimes choose to leave their housing to spend the 7 or more days recovering at the family home but should exercise cough etiquette and good hygiene to prevent spread of flu to a family member.

Students who live in housing with larger square footage who have their own bedroom and bathroom but share kitchen and living room should minimize time spent in shared space and preferentially spend time in their non-shared room. The sick individual should exercise excellent hygiene to lessen exposure of others to the virus by covering the cough, using and discarding tissue, and decontaminating shared spaces that have been touched or might have droplets. The sick and the well should frequently wash hands and keep hands away from the nose, mouth, and eyes.

Q: I am an NC State employee and have been diagnosed with H1N1 flu. Do I need to notify my supervisor?

A: Yes. You should notify your supervisor about your diagnosis and follow recommendations of your medical provider about staying away from work and any other recommendations about the treatment of your illness.

Q: May I attend classes or work if I have flu-like symptoms?

A: If you have symptoms suspicious for flu, monitor your symptoms. Contact your medical provider if you have questions about your symptoms or for an appointment. Stay home and avoid exposing others if you have flu-like symptoms. If you must go out in public prior to getting a diagnosis, use a tissue if you sneeze, blow your nose, or cough, then discard the tissue. Use hand sanitizer or wash hands that may have been contaminated by used tissues or by droplets from the nose or mouth. Remember that there are many illnesses that have symptoms similar to flu that are not the flu and that do not require being away from class or work multiple days.

Q: A co-worker has been diagnosed with H1N1 flu in my office. Who should disinfect the office?

A: It is a good practice for faculty, staff, and students to clean and decontaminate their own workspace periodically, regardless of whether there has been an ill co-worker. Housekeeping Services will not provide additional cleaning services for the flu.

A number of products are effective at decontaminating surfaces, including bleach-containing cleaners, Lysol, and alcohol-based products.

The influenza virus lives minutes to hours on surfaces, and an individual is contagious a day before symptoms and for about 7 days after symptoms start.

It makes sense for someone to decontaminate surfaces in the workspace of the individual who became ill if the items in that workspace are shared (phone, keyboard, doorknobs, drawer handles, refrigerator handles), especially if that individual was at work in the previous few hours and there is a chance that live virus could still be present on surfaces.

Those who had close contact with a sick individual, especially if they were within 6 feet, should monitor themselves for symptoms or contact their medical provider to see if a prescription for an anti-viral medication to prevent flu is warranted.

Q: What should I use to clean my workspace or living space?

A: You should decontaminate shared items periodically, such as telephones, refrigerator handles, remote controls, keyboards, and doorknobs. Common household cleaners, such as bleach-containing cleaners, Lysol, or other cleaners, such as alcohol-based, should be effective.

Q: Will the University be hosting flu vaccine clinics this year?

A: Yes. The University hosts several vaccination clinics each fall for protection against strains of traditional flu. There is currently no vaccine for H1N1 influenza A, but pharmaceutical companies are currently developing vaccines and are hopeful that H1N1 vaccine will be available as soon as late October. Details about vaccination clinics for 2009-2010 will be released when that information becomes available.

Q: I had a flu shot last fall. Will that protect me from the H1N1 flu virus?

A: No. The novel H1N1 flu is a new strain of influenza A, and the vaccine received last fall did not contain protection against this new strain. Vaccines that will protect against novel H1N1 are currently in development and are expected to be available in the fall. Information will be provided to the campus when it becomes available.

Q: Is NC State planning to distribute facemasks or other personal protective equipment to campus?

A: Following the advice of public health agencies, CDC, and OSHA, NC State does not recommend the use of surgical masks, gloves, or other personal protective equipment for normal use to control exposure. Only mandatory employees categorized as "high" or "very high exposure risk" under OSHA will be included in respiratory protection planning.

Q: What does WHO Phase 6 mean?

A: World Health Organization (WHO) phases are markers of transmissibility of a disease. There are six phases. Phase 6 indicates a pandemic and is characterized by sustained human-to-human transmission. On June 11, 2009, WHO declared an Influenza Pandemic for H1N1 influenza.

The severity of the pandemic is based on an index. This index, from the lowest category of 1 to the highest category of 5, helps determine the impact the virus will have on a community and the planning needed to reduce the impact.

Q: Where can I get additional guidance and information about H1N1?

A: NC State maintains a series of resource materials and planning documents to educate our campus.

Orientation to Emergency Preparedness and Procedures:

<http://www.ncsu.edu/emergency-information/index.php>

University Infectious Disease Planning Information:

<http://www.ncsu.edu/ehs/pandemic/index.htm>

Student Health Services:

http://www.ncsu.edu/student_health/whatsNew/influenzaupdate.html

Outside resources provide additional information:

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services:

<http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/>

US Department of Health and Human Services:

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>

Centers for Disease Control:

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>

World Health Organization:

<http://www.who.int/en/>