

H1N1 (Swine) Influenza FAQ's for Parents

Updated August 3, 2009

What is H1N1 (swine) flu?

H1N1 (swine) Influenza is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. Swine flu viruses have been reported to spread from person-to-person, but in the past, this transmission was limited and not sustained beyond three people.

Is this H1N1 (swine) flu virus contagious?

CDC has determined that this swine influenza A (H1N1) virus is very contagious and is spreading from human to human. As of August 2009, H1N1 infection has been reported in over 70 countries.

How serious is this infection?

At the current time, it does not appear that the virulence of this influenza virus is any worse than the regular seasonal flu. However, since children and young and middle aged adults have no immunity to this virus, it is possible for this virus to spread rapidly in communities such as universities and schools where there are large numbers of susceptible adults and children.

What preventive measures can my student take to prevent acquisition of H1N1 infection?

The best advice is to try to stay in good general health by getting plenty of sleep, staying physically active, managing stress, drinking plenty of fluids, and eating nutritious food. Many college students typically do NOT follow this advice, but the Student Health Center is hoping that advice from parents and health care professionals will prompt more students to pay closer attention to these issues this flu season.

What if my student is well but his/her roommate is ill?

If the university campus classes and activities continue (like they do for any seasonal flu outbreak), the Student Health Center will encourage well students to follow basic hygiene practices such as hand washing to prevent the spread of illness from ill classmates or roommates to themselves. We know that some viruses and bacteria can live 2 hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, and desks. Frequent hand washing will help reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.

In addition, we encourage well students who are in close contact other students with influenza to contact the Student Health Center to discuss the possibility of getting preventive medications.

Is it possible to separate well students from ill students to prevent the spread of disease?

If the university begins to see widespread illness, then contingency plans are in place to begin separation of ill students from well students. In this case, there is a chance that regular campus operations will cease, and many students will go home temporarily.

What if classes are cancelled and my student is too ill to come home? Who will take care of my student?

Students who are too ill to take care of themselves will be admitted to Vanderbilt University Hospital.

Students who are ill but not in need of hospitalization will have access to the Student Health Center's resources for care, and will also have access the Medical Center's outpatient flu clinics. The Student Health Center will work with Housing to assure that ill students are physically separated from well students---depending on the prevalence of disease and the number of students, this will likely mean establishing temporary infirmaries so that ill students can have the support of Housing and Student Health staff in a centralized location. Under this scenario, Student Health Center staff will carefully monitor the health of these ill students to assess whether more care (such as hospitalization) is needed.

How have Vanderbilt and the Student Health Center prepared for an H1N1 outbreak?

The University maintains an active emergency preparedness team at all times that continually evaluates our preparedness for a variety of infections or biomedical emergencies (such as bio-terrorism). This team has continued to meet regularly and is prepared in the event that H1N1 infection at Vanderbilt (and Nashville) becomes widespread. We are prepared with medication, supplies, and staffing to provide care to our Vanderbilt students, faculty, and staff.

How likely is it that my student will be able to get the H1N1 vaccine?

The federal and state governments are in charge of distribution and funding for the H1N1 vaccine. The Student Health Center is registered with the Tennessee Department of Health and is hopeful that we will have vaccine supplies as early

as October 2009. Our website will be updated as we learn more about vaccine supplies and arrival dates. This vaccine will be free of charge to students.