

H1N1 (Swine) Influenza FAQ's for Parents

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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.

When does the CDC predict that H1N1 will hit the United States?

Nobody knows whether this infection will be widespread in the U.S early in the typical flu season (around October), or whether widespread illness will occur even earlier. It's even possible that the spread of the infection will be at low to moderate levels, but continue to be sustained throughout the spring and even into summer 2010. We all hope that the vaccine supplies for H1N1 will arrive before the infection is well established in our communities.

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.

The other key components of limiting the spread of infectious diseases such as influenza viruses includes frequent hand washing, and covering ones mouth when coughing.

What about masks? Are they useful in preventing the spread of disease?

Masks are dispensed to ill students at Student Health, in order to help prevent the spread of contagious secretions to others while in the clinic. The CDC does recommend that, as tolerated, the ill patient also wear the mask during time in public or even in the household, especially if quarters are tight. The reality is that it is difficult at times for an ill person to tolerate wearing the mask when there is fever, cough, and general malaise.

Since the data is not clear on this issue, the CDC does not routinely recommend the use of face masks by well persons in the community or in individual households, including households with "crowded conditions", which would apply to residence halls. The decision for a well student to wear a mask would be an individual choice and not one recommended by the CDC at this time.

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?

University residence halls operate at 100% occupancy, limiting the possibility of separating ill students from well students in the residence halls during usual operations of the university. If the H1N1 or seasonal (regular) flu case

numbers are similar to a typical flu season, then we will continue to stress good personal hygiene but will not be able to separate ill students from well students. If the case numbers are so high that there is widespread faculty, staff, and student absenteeism, then the university will follow the Tennessee Department of Health's likely recommendation to make plans to alter campus operations. In that case, we will begin the process of activating the University emergency plans, which would include separating well students from ill students to the extent possible, as most students make plans to leave campus.

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 to the Medical Center's outpatient flu clinics.

If illness is so widespread that regular campus operations cease, the Student Health Center will work with Housing to separate to the extent possible ill students from well students---depending on the prevalence of disease and the number of students, this may mean establishing temporary sites for ill students, so that they 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.

Is there anything that our family needs to do to prepare for H1N1?

We recommend that all families have an emergency family plan that can address a variety of circumstances, including the possibility of pandemic (widespread) H1N1 influenza. Family plans are recommended, for example, by all units of Vanderbilt University, so that the University can make sure that critical areas are staffed even during times of widespread faculty and staff illness (or illness in their families). The critical components of a family (including a student in the residence hall) plan include:

- The household should have basic over-the-counter medications (Tylenol, cough medicine etc..) available before the flu season begins
- Families should have a communication plan in case of emergency (text, phones, email)
- Each household should have basic first aid supplies, flashlights, batteries, and bottled water
- All families need to have contingency plans in place in the event that childcare, schools, camps, etc...are cancelled, so that alternative planning for young children can be arranged
- All families also need to have a plan in the event that college and university operations in the U.S are suspended. For example:
 - ✓ Will my student stay on campus or travel home?
 - ✓ How will my student travel home if airline travel is impossible because of emergency mass transit shut-down, or because of student illness?

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.