



August 27, 2009

Dear Parents and Guardians of Students at the University of Vermont,

H1N1 has been a prominent feature in the news in recent weeks and is likely to affect each of us in various ways. We're writing to give you a sense as to how we believe H1N1 may affect our campus in the coming months and to let you know the steps we're taking to address some of the challenges this virus may create. An important resource for you in the weeks and months to come is the University's emergency web site (<http://www.uvm.edu/~emergency/>). It has a variety of information about the University's planning and response to this situation as well as link to regional and national information resources.

What Steps Has the University Taken So Far?

The University has engaged in planning for a pandemic event for over three years. When H1N1 emerged this spring, the University's Emergency Operations Group (EOG) met in weekly session and has continued to meet through the summer months to address the challenges to our campus posed by this pandemic. Specifically, the EOG has utilized the resources of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and a strong working relationship with the Vermont Department of Health to insure that we take steps necessary to optimize the health of our campus community and assure the continuity of University operations. An important part of this work is ongoing education and communication about prevention measures and new developments as they occur. As a parent, you can expect to receive regular communication from us about what's taking place on campus. Your son or daughter will be receiving similar news from us.

About H1N1

As you know, H1N1 first appeared this spring in Mexico and its worldwide spread has prompted the World Health Organization to declare a pandemic. The virus became widespread in the Southern Hemisphere over these past months. As we move toward our usual (winter) influenza season, we fully expect H1N1 to begin causing illness as early as September. While there has been ongoing concern about the possibility that H1N1 would cause severe illness in many of those infected, experience over recent months has shown that the rate of serious illness in individuals is very close to that which we see in 'the usual' seasonal influenza. The symptoms of H1N1 are include fever, cough, runny nose, body aches, sore throat, and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea.

Some important points about this virus:

- It is transmitted two to three times more easily than is seasonal influenza.
- Individuals are contagious for approximately one day before they develop symptoms.
- As opposed to the typical course of events with seasonal influenza, college-aged individuals tend to contract H1N1 at relatively high rates compared with other (especially older) individuals.
- While the large majority of students who come down with H1N1 will do well with symptomatic care and will not need to see a clinician, those at higher risk of complications will need to be vigilant and seek care early (within 48 hours) of the onset of symptoms consistent with H1N1 or seasonal flu.
- Among college-age individuals, those at higher risk of severe illness from H1N1 include those who fall into one of the following groups:
 - Pregnant women
 - Those who have chronic pulmonary, cardiovascular, hepatic, hematological, neurologic, neuromuscular, or metabolic disorders. This includes those who have a history of asthma.
 - Those who are immunosuppressed, including those on certain medications or who have AIDS.

Treatment

There are medications available to treat influenza, including H1N1. While they are useful to those who require hospitalization and are important in preventing serious illness in people with serious underlying conditions (noted above), their ability to shorten the duration of symptoms by less than twenty-four hours makes them of marginal benefit in otherwise healthy individuals.

What We Expect

We expect to see H1N1 appear on campus early in the semester, likely in the opening weeks of school. It is possible that we may see absentee rates among students, staff, and faculty that range up to 30%. Most students will deal very well with the virus and will not need to see a clinician, and we are asking our medical staff at the Center for Health and Wellbeing to focus their efforts on evaluating and treating students who have underlying conditions as noted above.

While it is possible that schedules for a particular class may change for a brief period of time as a result of student or faculty illness, we do not expect to suspend classes at the University.

Is it Possible to Prevent H1N1?

Because the virus is spread by droplets from a cough or sneeze (which can land on surfaces and remain alive for two hours), the most effective means of prevention include use of a tissue or coughing into your sleeve if a tissue is not available. Beyond this, regular and frequent hand washing with soap and water *or* a hand sanitizer and keeping your hands away from your face are very effective ways to reduce the likelihood of infection.

Testing is underway to determine the safety and efficacy of a vaccine for H1N1. These trials are proceeding well thus far, and it appears likely that the vaccine will be available for use beginning in late October or early November. There is a high likelihood that the University will be designated as an

administration site for the vaccine. Students up to age 24 will be a target group for this vaccine, and we will insure that your son or daughter (and you) receive detailed information about how to receive the vaccine as that information becomes available. There will be no charge for this vaccine.

Seasonal Influenza

In addition to H1N1, we are also likely to see cases of seasonal flu this year. Because of this, it is important to make sure that students receive the immunization for this virus. Vaccines for seasonal influenza will be offered across campus beginning in late October at a cost of \$15. The dates, times, and locations for these clinics are available will be widely publicized.

If Your Student Becomes Ill

If your student ***has no underlying medical conditions*** and develops symptoms of influenza, it is important that they get adequate rest and use medication (acetaminophen or ibuprofen) as necessary to relieve symptoms. In order to minimize spread of the virus, it is important that students stay in their room or apartment for 24 hours after their fever returns to normal (without the use of medications which reduce fever). If they have questions or need advice, they should call the Center for Health and Wellbeing at 656-3350 to speak with one of our triage nurses. Students can reach someone for advice at this number 24 hours a day when classes are in session.

If your son or daughter ***has an underlying medical condition*** – including asthma – it is important that they call the Center for Health and Wellbeing (656-3350) soon after symptoms consistent with influenza begin. They may be candidates for treatment with an antiviral medication, which are most effective within the first 48 hours of the appearance of symptoms.

What Should My Student Do About Classes if They Become Ill?

Students should communicate directly with their professors by email or phone to inform them of their illness. Faculty have been educated about H1N1 and are being asked to consider the impact of influenza in devising absentee policies for their classes.

What if My Student's Roommate Becomes Ill?

As noted above, individuals are contagious for a period of time (about a day) before they become ill, and so it is highly likely that individuals living with someone who has the flu have already been exposed to the virus. It appears that the rate of illness among household/living area contacts of individuals with the flu is between 22 % and 33%. It is important for the roommates of ill students to minimize the likelihood of contracting the virus by washing their hands frequently and not sharing eating or drinking utensils. Maintaining a distance of three feet from the affected roommate may also be helpful in avoiding the infection. ***Individuals with underlying conditions whose roommates become ill*** should follow these guidelines *and* should contact the Center for Health and Wellbeing to discuss the advisability of taking medication to further decrease the likelihood of contracting the virus.

Are Masks Helpful in Preventing the Spread of the Virus?

We have no indication that surgical masks reduce the risk of infection when worn in public areas. The Centers for Disease Control has recommended that, in a dormitory setting, students who are ill

should wear a mask when in contact with roommates. Considering the fact that an ill student's roommates have already been exposed to the virus and given the discomfort of wearing a mask during waking and sleeping hours, the true efficacy of this particular recommendation is uncertain. It is quite possible that the measures suggested above – use of a tissue and frequent hand washing along with not sharing utensils – are the most practical approaches available to us.

What Can I Do?

Stay informed. This situation is changeable, and maintaining an awareness of new developments is important. The University's emergency web site (<http://www.uvm.edu/~emergncy/>) is an excellent place to start.

Don't worry more than is helpful for you or your student. The vast majority of individuals deal with this virus very well without a visit to the doctor.

Educate your student about prevention. Encourage them to be immunized against seasonal influenza and H1N1. Remind them about the importance of hand washing and using a tissue. If they become ill, remind them about the importance of staying away from class until they've been free of fever for a day, and seeking advice from the Center for Health and Wellbeing (656-3350) if needed. The Center is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm and Saturday from 9:00 am until 1:00 pm. When the office is closed, students may call for advice at the number listed above at any hour.

Consider sending your students care items such as hand sanitizer, a thermometer and ibuprofen or acetaminophen to help treat symptoms if they become ill.

What's Next?

We are committed to keeping the campus community (which includes you) informed about important news and events related to this pandemic, and we'll be in regular communication as the situation warrants.

Sincerely,

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