

Guidance for Responses to Influenza for Institutions of Higher Education during the 2009-2010 School Year

September 1, 2009

INTRODUCTION

This document provides brief guidance to help decrease the spread of flu among students, faculty and staff of institutions of higher education (IHE) and post-secondary educational institutions during the 2009-2010 school year. This document has three sections: 1) recommendations for updating Institutions of Higher Learning plans and leave policies, 2) recommended actions with conditions in Harris County being of similar severity to spring 2009 and 3) recommended actions if public health officials find that the flu starts causing more severe impact than was seen in spring 2009. *Public health officials will consider several factors when determining impact, such as illness severity, disease spread, health care system capacity, etc.*

Additional detailed information can be found in the following three documents from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- CDC Guidance for Responses to Influenza for Institutions of Higher Education during the 2009-2010 Academic Year:
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/institutions/guidance/>
- Technical Report for CDC Guidance for Responses to Influenza for Institutions of Higher Education during the 2009-2010 Academic Year:
<http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu/institutions/guidance/technical.htm>
- Preparing for the Flu: A Communication Toolkit for Institutions of Higher Education:
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/institutions/toolkit/>

For more general information on novel H1N1 influenza, please visit www.hcpbes.org, www.cdc.gov, or www.flu.gov.

SECTION 1: KEY PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

Facilitate self-isolation of students, faculty and staff with flu-like illness

- Develop sick leave policies that remove barriers to faculty and staff staying home when they are ill or caring for an ill family member.
- Develop flexible policies that remove barriers to students staying home when ill or caring for an ill family member, such as penalties regarding missed classes/examinations or late assignments.
- Instruct non-residential students, faculty, and staff with flu-like illness to stay home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines.
- Do not require a doctor's note to confirm illness or recovery. Healthcare providers need to focus on patients with more severe illness and may not be able to provide timely documentation.
- For those who cannot leave campus, and who do not have a private room, consider providing temporary, alternate housing for ill students until 24 hours after they are free of fever.
- Instruct students with flu-like illness to promptly seek medical attention if they have a medical condition that puts them at increased risk of severe illness from flu, are pregnant, are concerned about their illness, or develop severe symptoms such as increased fever, shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure, or rapid breathing.
- Consider implementing distance/web-based learning to help students maintain self-isolation.

SECTION 2: ACTIONS INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING SHOULD IMPLEMENT NOW

Under conditions with similar severity as in spring 2009

Stay home when sick

- Remind students that those with flu-like illness should stay home and limit interactions with others (self-isolate), except to seek medical care, for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines. They should stay away from others during this time period even if they are taking antiviral drugs.
- Recommend students with a private room to remain in their room and receive care and meals from a single person if possible.
- Suggest that students establish a “flu buddy system” in which students pair up to care for each other if one of them becomes ill. Additionally, staff can make daily contact by e-mail, text messaging, phone calls, or other methods with each student who is in self-isolation.

Sick students should be instructed to go home

- Residential students with flu-like illness should be instructed to return to their dorm and limit interactions with others (self-isolate), except to seek medical care, for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medicines even if taking antiviral drugs.
- Non-residential students with flu-like illness who live relatively close to the campus should be instructed to go home. These students should be instructed to do so in a way that limits contact with others as much as possible. For example, travel by private car or taxi would be preferable over use of public transportation.
- If close contact with others cannot be avoided, the ill student should be asked to wear a surgical mask during the period of contact. Examples of close contact include kissing, sharing eating or drinking utensils, or having any other contact between persons likely to result in exposure to respiratory droplets.

Discourage campus visits by ill persons

- Use a variety of communication methods such as e-mail, posters, flyers, and media coverage to discourage people with flu-like illness from visiting the campus or attending IHE events such as football games or concerts until they have been free of fever for at least 24 hours.

Get Vaccinated

- Contact your local public health officials to determine where flu vaccine will be administered and to discuss the possibility of a vaccination clinic at the IHE.
- Encourage students, faculty and staff to get vaccinated for seasonal flue.
- Encourage students to get vaccinated for 2009 H1N1 influenza as recommended by public health officials.

Encourage hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette

- Emphasize flu prevention messages: stay home when sick, wash hands frequently with soap and water when possible, and cover noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or a shirt sleeve or elbow if no tissue is available).

Routine cleaning

- Establish regular schedules for frequent cleaning of high-touch surfaces (for example, bathrooms, doorknobs, elevator buttons, and tables).
- Use cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.

- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by students before each use.
- Encourage students to frequently clean their living quarters, including high-touch surfaces.

Considerations for specific student populations

- Review policies for study abroad programs, including accessing health services abroad and reporting illness to the IHE.
- Communicate plans, policies, and strategies to partner K-12 schools regarding “early/middle college” students, prospective student tours, and other K-12 students regularly on campus.
- Determine if special communication strategies are needed to meet the needs of students with disabilities.
- Remind health-care profession students to follow infection control guidance for health-care workers. Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/clinicians> for guidance for health care settings.

Section 3: Actions Institutions of Higher Education May Be Advised to Implement Later

Under conditions with **increased severity** compared to spring/summer 2009

Permit high-risk students, faculty, and staff to stay home

- Develop flexible policies that include accommodations such as:
 - allowing high-risk students to withdraw for the semester,
 - tailoring sick leave policies for faculty/staff, or
 - modifying work responsibilities and locations.

Increase social distancing

- Explore innovative ways to increase the distance between students (for example, moving desks apart or using distance learning methods). Ideally, there should be at least 6 feet between people at most times.
- Consider suspending/ modifying public events such as films, sporting events, or commencement ceremonies.

Extend the self-isolation period

- Encourage those with flu-like illness to stay home for at least 7 days after the onset of their symptoms, even if they have no more symptoms. If people are still sick after 7 days, they should stay home until 24 hours after they have no symptoms.

Class suspension

IHEs should use multiple channels to communicate a clear message about the reasons for suspending classes and the implications for students, faculty, staff, and the community. The length of time classes should be suspended will vary depending on the goal of class suspension as well as the severity and extent of illness. IHEs that suspend classes should do so for at least five to seven calendar days. Before the end of this period, public health officials will assess whether to continue the suspension or recommend classes to resume.

- *Preemptive* dismissals may be used to proactively decrease the spread of flu.
 - Local public health officials may recommend preemptive school dismissals if the flu starts to cause more severe impact. Public health officials will work closely with IHE officials to balance the risks of flu in their community with the disruption that suspending classes will cause in both education and the wider community.
 - If classes are suspended preemptively, large gatherings (for example, sporting events, dances, commencement ceremonies) should be cancelled or postponed.
- *Reactive* dismissals might be an appropriate action when IHEs are not able to maintain normal functioning for example, when a significant number and proportion of students are attending class with a fever despite the school having implemented the above recommendations.
- IHEs with only **nonresidential students** should work with local public health officials to consider whether they can allow faculty and staff to continue use of their facilities while classes are not being held. This may allow faculty to develop lessons and materials and engage in other essential activities.
- IHEs with **residential students** should also plan for ways to continue essential services such as meals, custodial services, security, and other basic operations for students who remain on

campus. When possible, dismiss students who can get home – or to the home of a relative, friend of the family, or host family – by private car or taxi. International students and others without easy access to alternative housing should stay on campus, but increase the distance between people as much as possible.