

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT H1N1 FLU AND MIAMI UNIVERSITY



FAMILY As a parent you may have specific concerns about your student and their risk of developing or being exposed to H1N1 influenza. The following questions may answer some of your concerns, but if not please visit the website (www.muohio.edu/health) or send us an email (walengga@muohio.edu).

Q. What is Miami University doing about H1N1 influenza on campus?

A. Miami University is very aware of the ongoing spread of disease caused by the H1N1 virus, as well as the yearly concern of seasonal influenza in the campus community. The university has a plan for addressing emergency medical concerns and the plan is driven by the type of emergency, the severity of the emergency and the recommendations of the CDC and the state and county health departments. Student Health Service is monitoring this situation closely and is keeping abreast of the latest news and recommendations from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as well as the World Health Organization (WHO). This situation has been dynamic, with information often updated daily. As new developments occur that need to be relayed to the campus community we will post information on the Student Health Service website, we encourage you to view the information there (www.muohio.edu/health) and then contact us if we have not addressed your concern (walengga@muohio.edu).

Q. What do I tell my student to reduce his/her risk of developing the flu?

A. Several things: 1) Remind him/her of good, basic hygiene: wash his/her hands often or use hand sanitizer often; avoid people who have flu symptoms; do not share beverage containers, eating utensils, dishes or toothbrushes; frequently clean commonly used items such as: remote controls, doorknobs, telephones and MP3 players; limit contact with friends who are sick. Be sure that your student is eating healthy and getting enough sleep, these are basic to a healthy immune system. 2) Remind your student to get flu shots, both seasonal and H1N1 when available. The Student Health Service will start doing seasonal flu shots next week by appointment, encourage your student to call 529.3000 and make an appointment. 3) Talk to your student about partying and beer pong, the myth that drinking alcohol will kill any germs is a myth. Alcohol used as a disinfectant is about 70% alcohol, a much higher concentration than anyone can safely consume.

Q. Are there other things I can do to protect my student?

A. Be sure that s/he has supplies in the event s/he becomes sick. Basic health supplies such as a thermometer, boxes of tissues, acetaminophen or ibuprofen are essential, you may also want to suggest cough syrup since many students do get a cough. If your student has a refrigerator a supply of juice or other beverages to drink when they are sick is very valuable. Hand sanitizer to carry with them, cleaning wipes for their keyboard and other objects in their room are also very helpful.

Q. What if my student gets sick?

A. If your student has mild symptoms of the flu, please encourage him/her to self-isolate (do not go to class, dining halls, campus or off-campus events) until his/her temperature is normal for 24 hours (without any fever reducing medications). If your student has a chronic health condition such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease or their symptoms are severe (fever of 102 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, unable to keep liquids down, severe headache or dizziness) recommend that s/he call the student health service at 529.3000 for an appointment to be seen by a clinician.

Q. My student's roommate has been told s/he has the flu, should I tell my student to go to a hotel until the roommate is better?

A. If your student's roommate has the flu, the student has been exposed and going to a hotel would not eliminate that exposure. The best advice you can give your student (whether his/her roommate is sick or not) is: There is H1N1 flu on the campus. This flu is more easily spread than typical seasonal flu, but the disease itself is mild. Before your roommate gets sick, be sure that you do not share cups, dishes, eating utensils, bathroom glasses, etc. Wash your hands frequently and minimize touching your nose, mouth, eyes, ears and face. Maintain a healthy immune system by eating well and getting 8 hours of sleep every night. Manage your stress with exercise/relaxation. Call and make an appointment at the Student Health Service (529.3000) for the Seasonal Flu vaccination now; when the H1N1 vaccine is available, be sure you get your vaccination.

If your roommate is now sick, your roommate is encouraged to stay in his/her room and minimize contact with others. If the sick student's home is relatively close, the student may decide to go home to recover, but the sick student is not expected to vacate the room. Your healthy student can be encouraged to use another study location, but that is also not necessary. Encourage your student to make sure surfaces such as: doorknobs, light switches, remote controls, cell phones, anything the roommates touch are cleaned regularly. Sanitizing wipes are very effective on objects such as these.

Q. When should I tell my student to go to a local emergency room?

*A. **Emergency warning signs** that need urgent medical attention include: Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, sudden dizziness, confusion, severe or persistent vomiting, if Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough, temperature over 102, not controlled by acetaminophen or ibuprofen.*

In all other situations, if your student goes to the emergency room, s/he may be waiting for a very long time to be told to go home, rest, and practice self-care. There is one emergency room in Oxford, and as in all emergency rooms, care is prioritized based on need. CDC is strongly encouraging every one with mild symptoms to self-manage their illness because of an anticipated drain on available health care facilities, particularly emergency rooms.

Q. Can my student be given Tamiflu at the Student Health Service?

A. The recommendations for providing Tamiflu are very limited and most patients with mild flu really should not take it. The greatest concern, according to the World Health Organization, is the risk that the H1N1 virus becomes resistant to the medication. Also, use of Tamiflu can prevent the person from developing any immunity to the virus. Each student's symptoms will be evaluated individually and if appropriate, based on his/her clinical condition, the student may be given a prescription for an antiviral, such as Tamiflu. Tamiflu is also not recommended for routine prophylaxis in healthy individuals.

Q. As a parent of a student who attends an institution should I bring them home?

A. Residential students with flu-like illness whose families live relatively close to the campus are encouraged to go home to self-isolate. They should return home 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 flu severity increases, students at higher risk for flu complications including students, faculty, and staff with certain chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, or asthma, or who are pregnant may consider staying home while flu transmission is high in their institutional community. When it becomes apparent that the severity is increasing, we will post that information on the SHS website to assist students and parents in making a decision to leave campus. Currently, the CDC is recommending that healthy students continue to focus on their education and stay on campus.

Q. Realistically, how serious will the H1N1 flu be?

A. Health and Human Services Director Kathleen Sibelius on August 24, 2009, said it is plausible that up to 50 percent of the U.S. population could become infected with H1N1 before next spring. Most people will be sick up to 7 days and recover without problems. High-risk people should see their health care providers. More information is here: www.flu.gov or www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu. Miami medical director Dr. Greg Calkins says it is reasonable to expect 30 percent or more of the Miami community will contract H1N1.

Q. How does it compare to the regular seasonal flu?

A. In a typical flu season, 5-20 percent of the population contracts the flu.

Q. Talk about the vaccines available for seasonal flu and for H1N1.

A. The H1N1 flu vaccine is not yet available. Miami will announce its plan for distribution, following CDC and Butler Co. Health Dept. guidelines, once the vaccine is here. The seasonal flu vaccine will be available to distribute to students by the 1st of September. Employees may receive the season flu vaccine at clinics Sept. 18 and Oct. 5.

Q. If students are supposed to “self-isolate” and stay in their rooms, how can they get a doctor’s note to present to their teachers?

A. Student Health Services has not generally provided such medical notes for students. It is expected at Miami that faculty and students communicate regarding necessary absences. In this unique flu season, when an ill person (student, faculty or staff) may need to stay in bed for 7 days, special consideration will be needed to address the absences.

Q. Also, how will health services track how many students are sick if they’re staying in their rooms?

A. We will not be able to track total numbers as accurately as we would usually like. However, it is even more important for our treatment and advice to protect and help students and staff as much as possible. Our procedures will be influenced more by any future changes in the severity of illnesses. This is one reason why it is important to follow the advice in the next answer.

Q. When do you want to see a sick student?

A. It is important for students who have temperatures of at least 102 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius with a cough and/or sore throat to call the Student Health Service for an appointment (529-3000). Students who have flu symptoms but also have chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma, or heart problems also should call for an appointment.

Q. How about sick faculty?

A. The CDC recommendation is that anyone with flu symptoms self-isolate (stay home with limited outside contact) until his/her temperature has been normal for 24 hours without any medications to reduce the temperature.

Q. Will sick students be sheltered in one place on campus?

A. At this time there is no plan to shelter students in one (or several) places on campus. Because this particular virus is highly contagious, but the disease is relatively mild, sheltering in one place (or quarantining) is not a practical option. If students are sick and live within a reasonable driving distance of the campus, they may decide to go home until they feel better. But for the typical student, staying in their room with limited contact with others is the best approach.

Q. Will the university close if enough employees and students are sick?

The CDC is not recommending school closures at this time. Closing presents other challenges for students who live great distances from campus and for employees who are involved in critical projects. The plan for Miami is to have the various departments prioritize what their work flow would be when a critical number of employees are ill. This is to ensure that “essential” work continues and that student health and safety needs are met.

Q. Why are we not testing to make sure the Type A flu is H1N1? Won't that make for a false count?

A. At this time, the CDC is limiting confirmation testing of H1N1 to hospitalized patients and “clusters” that they identify as needing further testing. This is based on several months of experience with the flu as it spreads throughout the world and the need to use limited resources wisely. Typing becomes more critical if the virus appears to change or become resistant to treatment, or if a seasonal flu virus appears during the same time.

Q. Are masks an effective deterrent? Will people be wearing them?

A. Students who come to the Student Health Service with specific symptoms will be given a mask when they wait in the building to be seen. If the student is diagnosed as presumptive for H1N1 we will give them a mask to use when they are “self-isolating” in their room and a friend brings them food or supplies. However, masks can give people a false sense of security. A sick person wears the mask to reduce making his/her contacts sick. A healthy person needs to practice good prevention (hand washing, not touching my mouth, nose, eyes, etc., avoiding individuals who are sick etc. and not depend on a mask to reduce the risk of getting sick.) Masks do not work if they become wet or torn or are not worn properly (covering one's nose and mouth and fitting snugly). Student health services strongly discourages wearing masks to walk around the campus or sit in a classroom; they are not effective used this way and are often uncomfortable to wear.