



August 10, 2009

Dear Penn State student:

While you may not be seeing much in the news now about the H1N1 virus (swine flu), we want to provide important information to you about this virus and the impact it may have at Penn State this fall. Please share this information with your parents or family members.

Staff at University Health Services are closely tracking the information provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PaDOH). They recently met with PaDOH officials to be able to provide you the most up-to-date information available. On June 11, 2009, the WHO declared that H1N1 is causing a pandemic or worldwide outbreak. Illness is currently peaking in the southern hemisphere and waning in the northern hemisphere, including the United States.

Even so, public health officials predict that the H1N1 virus will return in the fall with cases occurring in the United States as early as late September or early October. This is an illness that is more prevalent in individuals 5 to 25 years of age than in any other age group. College campuses, such as Penn State, are likely to see high numbers of cases in the new school year.

Since this disease is occurring widely and is highly contagious, public health recommendations are aimed at mitigation, rather than containment. The primary goal is to reduce the burden of the disease and minimize its spread, and the most effective strategies for mitigation are hand-washing, cough, and cold etiquette, and other non-pharmacological interventions (NPIs). The most important NPI currently recommended is the exclusion of ill individuals from public, school, and group activities. As you can imagine, however, implementing this recommendation will be challenging for all colleges and universities, including ours.

In compliance with the CDC and PaDOH recommendations, Penn State will strongly urge students with influenza symptoms to follow CDC self-isolation guidelines. Students should not attend class or any public gatherings while ill. Symptomatic students who live in residence halls should leave campus and return home to recover. The CDC recommends isolation until at least 24 hours after fever has resolved. For students who are unable to go home for their convalescence, the University will assist in identifying acceptable alternatives to the extent possible.

We will distribute information about prevention strategies to all students, staff, and faculty, and will work with academic administrators to ensure that faculty guidelines for class attendance are modified to respect the public health prevention mandates. Consistent compliance with the exclusion policies are the most important factors in mitigation. If the H1N1 strain that occurs in the fall is more virulent than the strain currently causing illness, recommendations will be modified and could become more stringent.

We are sorry to send gloomy news to you as you anticipate the beginning of the academic year at Penn State. However, we felt it best for you to have a realistic understanding of what may occur. If we and the public health officials are wrong about the probable outcomes, we will all be relieved.

Information and updates about H1N1 and Penn State's response can be found at <http://www.sa.psu.edu/uhs> and will be routinely included in the UHS Family Health Line, which you can access at <http://www.sa.psu.edu/UHS/news/famline.cfm>. If you have questions, you may contact University Health Services staff at uhsinfo@sa.psu.edu.

Sincerely,

Damon Sims
 Vice President for Student Affairs