

Academic Affairs Policy: Continuity Plan for Extensive Absenteeism: H1N1	
Effective Date:	October 29, 2009
Revision Date:	

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### 1. Purpose & Overview

Institutions of higher education are being urged by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and American College Health Association (ACHA) to proactively engage in strategies to minimize the risk of a pandemic outbreak. Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Sebelius recently indicated that the US could see as many as 90,000 deaths from H1N1 flu in a worst-case scenario, in addition to the normal toll of annual flu deaths. Thus, this continuity policy is part of EMU's effort to ensure the continuance of student learning during any H1N1 outbreak, or other cause of extensive, university-wide absenteeism, and is only a small part of the University's overall continuity planning.

The CDC guidelines for higher education indicate that institutions should:

- make it easy for students, faculty and staff members with flu symptoms to self isolate;
- encourage individuals with flu-like symptoms to self-isolate until they are without a fever for 24 hours, without fever-reducing medication.

On the basis of CDC guidelines, and to protect EMU faculty, staff and students, the University is prepared to set aside university, departmental and individual policies that might cause sick individuals to feel compelled in any way to go to class or to work. An influenza-like illness (ILI) is defined as a documented fever greater than 100°F, cough and/or sore throat, in the absence of another cause. To minimize the risk of contagion, students and faculty experiencing ILI symptoms are to stay home, are not to attend class and, particularly, are to avoid gatherings. In these instances, students must not be

penalized academically for ILI-related absences. This continuity policy requires that faculty provide flexibility with attendance and grading policies that they would normally follow, *even if those policies have been published in course syllabi.*

### 2. Student Absenteeism

- *Reporting & verification of flu-like symptoms:* For a student to be given class accommodations for flu-related absences, they must notify their instructors by email, with a copy, or separate message to [H1N1@emich.edu](mailto:H1N1@emich.edu), as soon as possible. Students who are absent for more than one week, in addition to maintaining contact with instructors, should contact the Office of the Ombudsman (734-487-0074, or visit <http://www.emich.edu/ombuds/> to fill out an online contact form). Students will not be required to produce a written document from a physician for instructors.

- *Completing Course Requirements:* Students with the flu or with flu-like symptoms who miss assignments or other course responsibilities must be allowed to make up work without academic penalty, in accordance with existing policies in syllabi where possible. Of course, faculty have the discretion to excuse particular assignments based on other factors, such as the students' grades on other course work.

In situations when it is not academically sound for the faculty member to excuse the work, the faculty member may assign an incomplete at the end of the semester. This situation is not particularly encouraged because of the burden for both students and faculty, particularly in the case of an epidemic. Additionally, all existing policies for assigning incompletes must be followed, including the requirement that the student must be passing the course.

- *Medical Withdrawal:* The University is exploring creation of an emergency review panel for evaluation of student requests for medical withdrawal. The intent would be to use the existing student appeal process in conjunction with the emergency review panel.

### 3. Faculty Absenteeism

Article XI of the EMU-AAUP Master Agreement will continue to apply for all faculty absences due to illness, including ILI/H1N1. In these instances, reporting to the Department Head/School Director and University will continue with existing policy and practices. Faculty should have Department/School contact information and secretary contact information easily accessible when away from campus.

#### 4. Expectations of Academic Department Heads and School Directors

- *Communication:* Consistent and clear communication to faculty and students is essential at the level of the department/school. Thus, department heads/school directors should be proactive in:

- regularly informing/reminding instructional staff of the medical conditions requiring self isolation;

- reviewing and enforcing the department/school practice for faculty reporting their absences to DH/SD and/or department office;

- completing the attached emergency phone tree template and distributing it to appropriate personnel;

- requiring that a one-page document prepared by Academic Affairs regarding this policy be read/reviewed in every class so that students have common information; in the case of online courses, this document will be posted with the course shell;

- reporting the situation related to ILI/H1N1 absences of faculty and staff to Associate Deans according to the protocol outlined by Academic Affairs.

- encouraging faculty and students to follow recommended practices to lower the risk of becoming ill.

- *Course Contingency Planning:* Department Heads and School Directors should not wait until faculty are ill and absent from class before determining how to proceed with instructional delivery. In consultation with program directors, Department Heads and School Directors should have developed:

- a list of the department/school courses and who is teaching them, kept in a location which is easily accessible when away from campus;

- a potential backup instructor for each course (this may be a group of backups who are qualified to teach any course within a content area);

- contact information for all instructional staff on a list which is kept easily accessible when away from campus, including potential backup instructors who might not currently be on staff;

- a syllabus for each course on file, so backup instructors can determine how to continue with course delivery.

- *Departmental Management - Contingency Planning:* Department Heads and School Directors should define plans to deal with prolonged absence of themselves, clericals, and other staff. It is critical that:

- backup(s) be identified in consultation with the department or school Personnel Committee and the dean's office, prior to an event in which a Head or Director experiences prolonged absence;

- critical responsibilities be prioritized and reassigned to address an event in which any staff experience prolonged absence.

**Academic H1N1 FAQ for EMU Students**

**Q: What is an ILI?**

A: An influenza-like illness (ILI) is defined as a documented fever greater than 100°F, cough and/or sore throat, in the absence of another cause.

**Q: What should I do if I become ill with H1N1 flu-like symptoms?**

A: Stay home, away from class and other public places, until you are without a fever for 24 hours, without fever-reducing medication. This self-isolation will help prevent the spread of flu and give your body time to recuperate.

**Q: Should I notify my instructors?**

Yes. Inform your instructor(s) as soon as possible by e-mail that you are ill, and ask how to make up missed classes, tests, and assignments. Also, notify by copying, or sending a separate email to [H1N1@emich.edu](mailto:H1N1@emich.edu) when you send email to your instructor(s). If you are absent for more than one week, in addition to maintaining contact with instructors, you should contact the Office of the Ombudsman (734-487-0074, or visit <http://www.emich.edu/ombuds/> to fill out an online contact form). Do not wait until you ready to return to class to notify your instructor.

**Q: If I am absent due to the flu, am I responsible for what was covered in class?**

A: Yes. You are responsible for all course requirements, deadlines, and exams. Make arrangements with your instructor or classmates to find out what was covered.

**Q: How can I keep up with what's covered in lectures and labs?**

A: Establish now the habit of sharing notes with your classmates and lab partners. If your instructor agrees, ask a classmate to record classes or see if you can participate remotely, for example, by listening through a classmate's speaker phone.

**Q: What if I can't make up some required activity for a course?**

A: In some cases, your instructor may be able to substitute another activity, and you should work with your instructor to identify substitute assignments. If no appropriate substitution can be identified, work with your instructor to explore other options for meeting course expectations.

**Q: If I have been exposed to H1N1 flu but don't have symptoms, should I stay away from class?**

A: No. You need to attend class if you are not experiencing flu-like symptoms.

**Q: If I have H1N1 flu-like symptoms, when can I safely return to class?**

A: When you've recovered and are without a fever for 24 hours, without fever-reducing medication. If your symptoms are not improving, please seek medical care. In general, you should be back in class within a week. You may contact Snow Health Center at 487-1122 for assistance.

**Q: What if my symptoms persist or I get complications and am out longer than one week?**

A: Contact the Ombudsman's Office at 487-0074, or visit <http://www.emich.edu/ombuds/> to fill out an online contact form.

**Q: If I've recovered, do I need to bring a doctor's note excusing my absence from class?**

A: No, not for an influenza-like illness (ILI). But you should have already notified your instructors by email as soon as you developed symptoms and could not attend class.

**Q: How much time will I have to catch up with assignments and other course requirements?**

A: This is at the discretion of your instructor. All instructors have been asked to be flexible.

**Q: What if I cannot reach an accommodation agreement with my instructor?**

A: Pursue other options to resolve the situation, e.g. contact the Department Head/School Director, or the Ombudsman's Office.

**Q: Will classes or other campus activities be canceled if enough students get sick?**

A: We expect that classes and campus activities will continue as scheduled throughout fall semester. If the situation changes, announcements will be forthcoming regarding the cancellation of events and/or course activities.

**Q: If the University does need to cancel classes or activities, how will I be informed?**

A: Notification will be made through the regular communications processes for campus closures (i.e., RAVE, radio announcements, EMU website).

**Academic H1N1 FAQ for EMU Faculty**

**Q: Can I require a student to leave class if he or she appears to be sick?**

A: No. A student cannot be removed from class after arriving ill, but you can encourage them to go home, to contact Snow Health Center, and if needed the University Ombudsman, to take care of themselves, and return after they are without a fever for 24 hours, without fever-reducing medication.

**Q: Should I make a classroom announcement if a student notifies me that he or she has an ILI or H1N1?**

A: No. Publicly announcing students' illnesses to a class is a violation of their rights under the privacy requirements of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA). Also, since contagiousness is not always accompanied by visible symptoms, such an announcement will do little to limit other students' exposure to the virus, and may serve to raise their anxiety levels needlessly.

**Q: What changes can I make to my course or its organization to minimize the impact of predicted widespread absences?**

A: Instructors should try to place as much course content as possible, including assignments and lecture outlines, on class websites. Build in flexibility where possible if students are ill. In some cases, it might be possible for an instructor to arrange to broadcast his/her lectures via Skype or other telecommunications options. Academic Affairs is exploring electronic options for faculty to voluntarily use when appropriate; announcements will be forthcoming. Student illness in the early – middle stages of the semester should be dealt with by workload/assignment adjustments, not adding additional class instructional time. Late in the semester, faculty may judiciously and appropriately give incompletes.

**Q: Should students just drop my class if they are stricken by the flu?**

A: Dropping of a course should not be necessary since the typical H1N1 illness lasts 3 – 4 days. Every effort should be made by faculty to accommodate students during the illness and to make up work missed.

**Q: What should I do if a student has a sick child?**

A: Because children have less immunity to the H1N1 virus, it is important that the University be flexible with attendance related to child care issues during a wide-spread flu outbreak. This situation should be treated the same as if the student were ill.

**Q: How will I be notified of students' absences?**

A: To be given class accommodations for flu-related absences, students must notify their instructors by email, with a copy, or separate message to [H1N1@emich.edu](mailto:H1N1@emich.edu). Please be vigilant about checking email regularly, acknowledging receipt of students' emails, and communicating with your students about completing course requirements.