

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY GUIDANCE DURING H1N1 FLU OUTBREAK FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The following is a Q & A regarding general information about the H1N1 virus and how absences and/or unscheduled closedown of a unit, department, or the entire university specifically related to H1N1 will be handled. It will be updated as additional questions come to our attention. Please visit our website frequently. This document specifically addresses support staff absences only. Faculty and Lecturer absences will be handled through Academic Human Resources.

General Questions about H1N1 influenza

What are the symptoms of the new H1N1 flu?

The symptoms of H1N1 (swine) flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with H1N1 flu.

How is the H1N1 virus transmitted?

Seasonal and H1N1 flu are spread from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. These droplets can move through the air about 3 feet before they fall to the surface (of a desk, table, sink, keyboard, etc.) The flu spreads when a person comes into contact with the respiratory droplets of an infected person:

- directly, including by sharing eating or drinking utensils, kissing, etc. (This is why keeping a distance of about 6 feet from a sick person is important.)
- indirectly, by touching a surface or object that has flu viruses on it and then touching one's own mouth, nose, or eyes. (This is why frequent hand washing and cleaning of shared surfaces is important.)

What preventative measures should I encourage employees to take?

Awareness, thoughtfulness, and communication are the key ingredients to reducing the risk of catching and sharing the flu (and other illnesses). Encourage group conversations now about ways to reduce the risk in your particular work space, display posters to make others aware of your concerns, share expectations of each other regarding staying home when sick. Make sure everyone knows the common public health advice to avoid the flu:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- If tissues aren't available, cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water, especially after you cough, sneeze, or touch shared surfaces. If soap and water aren't available alcohol-based

- hand cleaners are also effective. (A concentration of 60% alcohol or higher is recommended.)
- Plan ahead to ensure that enough alcohol-based hand sanitizers are available for situations where hand-washing facilities may not be available.
 - Regularly clean all areas and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact (such as doorknobs, faucets, and handrails) and also immediately when visibly soiled. This may help, but should not substitute for hand washing.
 - Do not share cups, eating utensils, smoking paraphernalia, lip balm, etc.
 - Try to avoid close contact with sick people. Keep a distance of about 6 feet if possible.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
 - Get vaccinated.
 - Strengthen your immune system: eat a balanced diet; exercise on a regular basis; get plenty of rest.

I have a staff member who has asked to wear a facemask when meeting with students, staff, and customers to protect themselves from H1N1. How do I respond?

At this time wearing a facemask is not advised for healthy persons. Public health officials advise that anyone who is sick with flu-like illness should wear a surgical mask when close contact (within 6 feet) with others cannot be avoided. Facemasks may help to reduce the risk of transmitting the H1N1 virus from a sick person to others, especially when used along with other preventative measures.

I meet with students, staff, and customers as part of my job responsibilities. What should I do if I encounter someone who is obviously sick?

As with other forms of the flu or contagious illnesses such as colds, maintaining a reasonable distance from the sick person is a starting point. Do not shake hands or make other physical contact. After the person has left use a disinfectant wipe to clean those areas of your work station that the person has touched. There may be situations in which the meeting or encounter can be re-scheduled to a time when the person is feeling better, or the business can be conducted by phone or e-mail. Do not hesitate to offer this suggestion if it is appropriate.

Are flu evaluations available on campus for faculty and staff?

Snow Health Center nursing staff can answer questions and provide triage support by phone (487-1122). You may also schedule an appointment in the medical clinic. It will be considered an out-of-network visit. However, SHC participates with BCBSM in their pharmacy and laboratory.

Where may I get the H1N1 vaccine?

Snow Health Center will serve as a dispensing site to administer the H1N1 vaccine as soon as it is available. Employees and their families are eligible to receive the vaccine. The only cost will be an injection fee of \$10.

How severe is illness associated with 2009 H1N1 flu virus?

Illness with the new H1N1 virus has ranged from mild to severe. Most people who have been sick have recovered fully without needing medical treatment.

What should I do if I develop influenza symptoms?

If you become ill with flu-like symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, runny nose, or vomiting or diarrhea, contact your primary care provider, who will advise you on options for care.

If you are ill:

- Stay home and self isolate yourself until at least 24 hours after you are free of fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- Notify your supervisor that you are ill and will not be able to work.
- Avoid contact with other people and avoid social gatherings as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others. Wear a facemask if you are not able to totally isolate yourself and keeping a distance of 6 feet is not possible while convalescing.
- When coughing or sneezing, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue and then throw the tissue away. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve or elbow, not your hands.

When can I return to work if I have had H1N1 symptoms?

Flu viruses can be transmitted before, during, and after an infected person has symptoms; however, a person is most contagious during a fever. You should stay home until at least 24 hours after you are free of fever, or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications. Though the lingering of some symptoms (e.g. cough) may not be reason to remain at home, it is important to maintain flu prevention measures as it is still possible to transmit the virus for up to 7 days after you get sick.

Employee Absences

How will absences be covered for those employees who contract the H1N1 virus?

In keeping with university policy and applicable collective bargaining agreements absences due to illness as a result of contracting the H1N1 virus should be covered with the employee using sick leave.

What if the employee has no sick leave to cover their absence?

Employees who have exhausted their sick leave may use vacation time, compensatory time, or receive approved time off without pay for the duration of their illness provided the employee provides a statement from their treating medical provider that the time spent away from work was a result of symptoms associated with the H1N1 virus. Exempt status employees may work from home with supervisory approval.

What action should a supervisor take if an employee reports to work with obvious symptoms of the H1N1 virus? (See symptoms of H1N1 on the Swine Flu website located: <http://www.emich.edu/uhs/swineflu/>)

If an employee reports to work and has obvious symptoms of the H1N1 virus, the supervisor should discuss the matter with the employee. The decision to send an employee home that has flu-like symptoms will be made on a case-by-case basis. If the employee is sent home, the employee should be provided administrative leave for the day (*for repeated incidents the employee will be expected to use leave time*). Any days absent thereafter must be covered with sick leave, or if the employee has exhausted sick leave, with vacation time, compensatory time, or approved time off without pay. Exempt status employees may work from home with supervisory approval. The employee is to be advised that they are to stay home and self-isolate until 24 hours after their fever has passed. The supervisor must report the incident to Amanda Reynolds in the Department of Human Resources at areynolds@emich.edu or you may reach her by telephone at: 487-1052.

May I choose to go home if I don't want to be exposed to a sick coworker who isn't sent home?

Yes, with supervisory approval your time away from work will be handled in accordance with normal pay practices. Exempt status employees may be expected to work from home as an accommodation for approving such a request.

I'm not sick, but I don't want to come to work for fear of becoming ill. Is my supervisor required to approve my request for time off?

You may, with supervisory approval, request Vacation or Personal Leave; however, your supervisor may elect not to grant your request for time off, especially if your department is short staffed. It is important to educate yourself about the H1N1 virus and its transmission. Visit our Swine Flu website.

During the H1N1 flu outbreak can my supervisor cancel my leave request that has already been approved?

Yes, your supervisor has the authority to cancel any pre-approved leave request, especially in circumstances where there are serious staffing shortages as a result of illness.

Does FMLA apply if my spouse or child gets sick with H1N1 influenza, and I must stay home to care for him/her?

In most cases yes, provided the employee and family member meet the eligibility requirements. FMLA requires the university to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid job protected leave to an eligible employee to care for the employee's eligible family member, who has a serious health condition; or for a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the employee's job.

My child's school (day care) is closed due to circulation of H1N1 influenza, and my child is not sick. I have no other child care arrangements. Can I bring him to work with me?

Bringing a child to work is not recommended or advisable and in many work areas it is prohibited.

My child's school (day care) is closed due to circulation of H1N1 influenza, and my child is not sick. I have no other child care arrangements and must stay home with him. How will I be paid?

Promptly notify your supervisor of the reason for your absence and your anticipated return to work date. In this situation, the following options are available, although not all options will be available in all situations, depending upon the nature of your job responsibilities:

- Use accrued vacation, personal, or family health care leave.

- Use accrued compensatory time.

- Work from home with supervisory approval.

- Alternative work schedule with supervisory approval.

Work Schedules/Alternative Worksites

Does my supervisor have to approve my request to telecommute if there is widespread illness?

Supervisory approval is necessary to work from home, but not all requests to telecommute can be approved. Not every position is suitable for telecommuting, due to specific job duties that cannot be performed at home or operating requirements of the unit.

Can my supervisor schedule me to work hours or shifts that I normally do not work?

Yes, you may be asked to work more hours or different hours than normal, or reassignment to a different work area especially if the university is short staffed as a result of the influenza outbreak. The university will attempt to provide advance notice if possible.

If a large number of employees are unable to come to work because of illness from the flu, are there a maximum number of overtime hours my supervisor can require me to work?

In the event illness becomes more severe or widespread, everyone may need to work differently to ensure the university continues to function. You may be asked to work more hours or different hours than normal, especially if the university is short staffed.

Supervisors will make every effort to limit the number of overtime hours and to permit employees to take rest periods, and may use their discretion in scheduling additional breaks for employees working additional hours.

If I am required to work additional hours or a different shift as a result of the influenza how will I be paid?

Any non-exempt employee required to work must be paid. They should input their hours as usual, even if the hours are on a different shift than they usually work and even if it results in time worked over 8 hours in a day or 40 hours in the particular work week, incurring overtime costs. Exempt staff do not keep track of hours so they would receive their usual paycheck.

Closedown of a Unit, Department, or the University

How will leave time for an employee be covered if their unit, or department are closed, or if the university is closed as a result of H1N1?

If the Employer temporarily closes all or any portion of its operation due to H1N1, employees notified not to report for work, and employees not having been notified of the closedown who report for work and are later sent home, shall receive their regular hourly rate of pay, exclusive of shift premium, for up to but not exceeding the first eight (8) hours such employees were previously scheduled but unable to work by reason of the Employer's closedown. For the remainder of such closedown, employees may use sick leave, vacation time, compensatory time to the extent that such employee's leave time shall so permit, or receive approved time off without pay.

How will hourly (non-exempt) staff who are scheduled to work during a closedown be compensated?

During unscheduled closedowns, certain designated personnel (e.g. heating plant employees, physical plant maintenance employees, food service employees, public safety, or other employees) within the specific areas of the University subject to the closedowns may be required to report for work. Employees so required to work and who do work when the Employer temporarily closes all or any portion of its operation shall, in addition to their regular compensation, receive compensatory time off at the rate of one (1) hour for each hour of work actually performed during the period of the closedown, up to a maximum of eight (8) hours. Hours worked in excess of the eight (8) hours as above provided shall be compensated at the overtime rate.

How will salaried (exempt) staff who are scheduled to work during a closedown be compensated?

Salaried staff that are scheduled to work during a closedown will be compensated their normal salary for the pay period. With supervisor approval equivalent time off may be arranged.

Information contained in this document has been collected from various resources including the Cornell University Human Resources website.