

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff:

As we approach the start of the new academic year, we are beginning to experience a resurgence of the novel H1N1 influenza virus, much as was expected. As has been reported in the news, colleges and universities across the country have had outbreaks of the virus as classes began. While the virus appears to be easily transmitted from person to person, the good news is that it also seems to be relatively mild as an influenza illness and most people not in high-risk populations recover fully within a week.

The University's Advisory Committee on Communicable Diseases (ACCD), chaired by Vice President for Student Life Eric Godfrey, has been monitoring information related to the H1N1 influenza since last spring and preparing for its arrival at the University this fall. From everything we know at this point, we can expect a substantial fraction of our community to become ill with H1N1 influenza. A vaccine against H1N1 is expected to be widely available by mid-October, and when it is, we are planning for a mass inoculation program to get it to people as quickly as possible.

In the meantime, there are things we can do as a community to try to stem the rapid spread of the disease when it occurs. The virus can live on surfaces for up to eight hours, so frequent hand-washing with soap and water is crucial. It is also recommended that as soon as possible, people get the regular seasonal influenza vaccine to protect against seasonal flu. It is widely available from various community outlets. If Seattle campus students are unable to get the vaccine prior to arriving on campus, it is available at Hall Health's Immunization Clinic. It would also be wise for students (and others) to prepare a self-treatment kit for the flu that includes a thermometer, anti-fever medication (such as Tylenol™ or acetaminophen), hand sanitizer, surface disinfectant wipes, tissues, electrolyte packs to mix with water, and throat lozenges.

Most importantly, if you do become ill with flu-like symptoms (high fever and cough or sore throat), we encourage you to make every effort to isolate yourself by staying at home or in your room. We would prefer that you miss work or miss class if you become ill. The best method we know for trying to limit the spread of the disease is to avoid contact with others after you become ill. You may return to work or classes when you have not had a fever for 24 hours without taking fever-lowering medication.

We are all vulnerable to catching the virus, and we are all in this together. We will all need to find ways to be flexible and accommodating, both in terms of covering staffing shortages due to unusual absenteeism and helping students make up missed work. Students are encouraged to contact instructors or professors via e-mail to see how they can make up missed work. We will be making online resources available for faculty to supplement their instructional materials.

There are a number of campus resources for information and guidance about the flu. On the Seattle campus, Hall Health Center provides care for students, and they should contact the Center if they have questions or concerns. Information specific to the novel H1N1 influenza virus is posted to the Campus Health Services web site at www.uw.edu/flu. Look there for updates and the most recent developments regarding influenza at the University.

There is no way of knowing how widely the novel H1N1 influenza virus will spread or when, but I think it is fair to assume that many of us will become ill this fall and will miss some days of school or work. We will keep the campus informed as information becomes available during the quarter, both in terms of the incidence of the disease in our community as well as when a vaccine becomes available and the plan for administering it.

In the meantime, I hope you come to campus healthy and that you stay healthy throughout the academic year.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Emmert
President