

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE ABOUT INFLUENZA AND YOUR HEALTH

Flu (“Influenza”) remains in the news. It’s important to know the facts to protect your health.

Flu is a virus-caused illness producing a high temperature, sore throat, running nose, headache, dry cough and muscle pain. The illness is widespread, especially during the winter months. It can sometimes be fatal.

Seasonal Flu

Various flu forms that circulate each year are known as “seasonal flu.” Seasonal flu causes approximately 36,000 deaths annually, usually among the very young and the very old.

H1N1 (Swine Flu)

Because viruses mutate constantly, new flu forms appear from time to time. Because the Swine Flu (officially known as the “H1N1 virus”) is a new strain, no one has immunity to it. It has typical flu symptoms, and spreads very quickly. A vaccine is now being produced, but it will not be ready in large quantities until mid-fall. Swine flu infects children and young adults (ages 5 through 24) at much higher rates than the general population. For this reason, and because students, faculty and staff are in close proximity to each other in schools and colleges, we are monitoring the situation closely.

Protect Yourself and Others

Health experts, including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, recommend taking “**Three Steps to Fight the Flu.**”

1. Good Hygiene Stops Germs

The importance of good hygiene cannot be overemphasized. Simple steps can help protect your health, and the health of those around you.

- a. Wash your hands frequently with warm water and soap, especially after sneezing or coughing. Always wash carefully after using the toilet, and before eating.
- b. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing; throw it away immediately in a trash container. Or, sneeze/cough into your elbow.

- c. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread quickly this way.
- d. Avoid sharing eating utensils or drinking cups with others.

2. Get Vaccinated

- a. There are many flu strains. Seasonal flu vaccine is a mixture which protects against the three strains scientists believe are most likely to strike during a given year.
- b. Swine Flu was discovered too late to be included in this year's seasonal flu vaccine mixture. Because of this, two vaccines will be available: seasonal flu vaccine and Swine Flu vaccine.
 - a. Seasonal Flu vaccines will be in a plentiful supply at doctor's offices and clinics.
 - b. Swine Flu vaccine will be available in October to people in high risk categories. More will be available later to others.
- c. Flu vaccine can protect you from getting the flu, or make it milder if you do catch it.
- d. Flu vaccine is especially important for those at highest risk: young children, pregnant women, people with asthma, diabetes, heart or lung disease, and people 65 years of age or older, or those living with them (to protect the high risk person).

3. Follow Your Doctor's Advice

- a. If you think you have the flu, promptly call your doctor's office or clinic. Except in a serious emergency, do not go there without calling first (to avoid infecting others). Always follow your doctor's advice.
- b. Your doctor might prescribe an "anti-viral" medication. Anti-viral medications are not appropriate in every case, and depend on the type of flu you have and your condition. They can ease symptoms, make flu less severe, and speed recovery. They cannot help you avoid the flu, and are not a substitute for vaccinations. Only your doctor can determine if an anti-viral medication is appropriate in your case.

If you get the flu, stay home from school and work until you have been fever free (without any aspirin, ibuprofen or acetaminophen)

for 2 days. Protect others by staying at least three feet away whenever possible.

For more information about the flu, vaccines and expert recommendations, refer to these websites:

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/flu

Massachusetts Department of Public Health: www.mass.gov/dph