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Below are some frequently asked questions about the H1N1 (swine) flu.

Why is UCF experiencing many cases of the H1N1 flu?

The H1N1 virus has been a public health challenge for universities around the country, particularly since the average age of patients around the country is about 20 years old. UCF is the fifth-largest university in the nation, and we will have more than 50,000 students attending classes during the 2009 fall semester.

As the flu continues to spread throughout the United States, we expect additional cases at UCF and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) anticipate more H1N1 illness this fall.

How has UCF responded to the H1N1 virus?

The health and well-being of our students, faculty and staff is our top priority, and UCF has been working diligently to help our campus community stay healthy.

We are following CDC guidelines and precautions and are maintaining our standard cleaning and sanitizing measures, which are very thorough. We also are working closely with the Florida Department of Health and local county health departments.

Our communications with students have included a dedicated H1N1 website (via www.hs.sdes.ucf.edu), e-mail updates, posters in residence halls promoting good hygiene and presentations from resident assistants about steps students can take to stay healthy. Discussions regarding the H1N1 flu have taken place during summer orientation sessions for parents and students.

A team of staff, including Health Services and Housing & Residence Life, is meeting and communicating regularly to discuss H1N1 and the university's response.

Our Health Center is taking same-day appointments as appropriate and has taken precautions to prevent/reduce the spread of the virus, such as placing students in masks immediately when they come in with flu symptoms.

At UCF, we are taking the H1N1 flu very seriously. We urge everyone on our campus and in our community to take it seriously as well. Focus on personal prevention and help yourself and others stay healthy.

How does the H1N1 virus spread?

Spread of this H1N1 virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose. (Source: www.flu.gov)

What are the best ways to protect myself from getting the virus?

UCF Health Services advises students, faculty and staff to take the precautions outlined below to help themselves and others stay healthy. This advice is from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. We recommend that when you wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands. (Source: www.flu.gov)

How can I tell if I have the H1N1 virus, and what should I do if I suspect I have it?

Flu-like symptoms include fever (100 degrees F or 37.8 C temperature), cough, sore throat, body aches, runny nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. If you are experiencing these symptoms, call or visit the Health Center or contact your health care provider.

Am I at a higher risk of getting the H1N1 virus?

People at high risk for complications of the H1N1 virus, and other strains of the seasonal flu, include those with the following conditions: Chronic pulmonary (including asthma); cardiovascular (except hypertension); renal, hepatic; hematological (including sickle cell disease); neurologic; neuromuscular; metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus); and obesity. Pregnant women also are at high risk for complications. Anyone in those high-risk groups should contact their health care provider if they exhibit flu-like symptoms.

What happens if I'm a patient with flu symptoms who visits the UCF Health Center?

Students experiencing flu-like symptoms are immediately given masks when they arrive at the Health Center. Students experiencing such symptoms may be offered a rapid influenza diagnostic test. If that test is positive, then the virus is almost certainly H1N1. The Health Center provider may prescribe the antiviral medication Tamiflu and instruct the student to stay in isolation. The CDC recommends that individuals with influenza-like illness remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100 degrees F or 37.8 C temperature), or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications.

Each student at the Health Center with a presumptive diagnosis for H1N1 flu is given a "Patient Care Advisory for H1N1" form with guidelines to help them recover quickly and prevent the spread of the virus.

At this time only the Florida Department of Health's laboratory system can perform the sub-type testing to confirm that a patient has the H1N1 virus, and the state has strictly limited the number of samples that are tested.

If I am a student diagnosed with influenza, should I recover at home?

Ideally, students can go back home to recover in a more comfortable setting with their families. For some students, however, staying in their residence hall or off-campus apartment may be the best or only option. Students are urged to stay in their rooms as much as possible and to wear a mask whenever they leave.

If my roommate is diagnosed with influenza, what can I do?

On-campus residents whose roommates are diagnosed with influenza and are staying on campus to recover can contact their resident assistants or other staff in their residence halls. Housing & Residence Life staff can determine if there are any other available rooms where the student could stay temporarily.

What should I tell my professors if I am diagnosed with a likely case of H1N1 and need to miss class?

Students can use the "Patient Care Advisory for H1N1" that is signed and dated by the Health Services provider as proof of illness for class absence. Students who would like a copy of the form and are seeing an outside provider can request one from the Health Center by calling 407-823-2701.

Make-up work for class(es) missed must be discussed with and agreed upon by faculty members. UCF appreciates any assistance faculty and staff members can give to students affected by H1N1.

Because of privacy laws concerning protected health information, UCF Health Services staff cannot notify faculty or staff members about a student's illness.

If I am an employee with flu symptoms, what should I do?

You should contact your health care provider and notify your supervisor that you are ill and will not be able to report to work. If you are diagnosed with influenza, you should stay in isolation until at least 24 hours after you are free of fever (100 degrees F or 37.8 C temperature), or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications.

Can I work from home during the time when I am in isolation, if my young child falls ill or if H1N1 impacts my child-care arrangements?

Employees should contact their departmental manager about the possibility of working at home. It may be allowed depending on the employees' job duties and whether they can be completed at home.

Some UCF employees who are subject to the Fair Labor Standards Act for overtime (such as OPS and USPS employees) are not encouraged to work from home because of the difficulty in tracking hours and work production.

As a supervisor, what can I do to assist my employees who are sick and those who are healthy?

Supervisors should contact Human Resources for assistance in making decisions about employees who appear sick and come to work. Those decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis.

UCF also encourages supervisors to advise employees of the steps they can take to stay healthy, such as washing their hands frequently and covering their nose and mouth with a tissue, or their sleeve if they do not have a tissue, when they cough or sneeze.

Where can I find more information about the H1N1 virus?

The latest updates and advice from UCF can be found on the university's Health Services Web site, www.hs.ucf.edu, and News & Information Web site, www.news.ucf.edu.

For more information about the H1N1 virus and a broader list of frequently asked questions, you can visit the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Web site at www.flu.gov.