

DATE: October 20, 2009

TO: College Community

FROM: Dr. Rick Rowland, Manager, Health Services

SUBJECT: INFLUENZA UPDATE

H1N1 continues to gain much public and media interest, and as promised, we're keeping the College community updated when conditions warrant.

One case of H1N1 has been confirmed in an Algonquin College student. The student in question is not a residence student and has not attended classes since beginning to feel ill. The student is not hospitalized and will remain absent from classes until healthy.

This is the first confirmed case of H1N1 on campus. It would be reasonable to expect that there will be others that you may or may not hear about.

Your best protection is in both having the vaccine and in observing the recommended hygiene practices of hand washing and staying home when you are sick.

You will not need a doctor's note for short absences from the College due to 'flu-like illness.'

If you have been in contact with someone with Influenza, but you are not having a fever or cough, you do not need to stay home. You should, however, be extra vigilant to observe all the recommended precautions.

Additional information:

1. **There is H1N1 Influenza in the Ottawa area right now.** We are not waiting for it to arrive: it is here now. Most cases are mild, but you will more often hear about the few that are more severe. There are also many cases of respiratory infections that are not influenza, but are similar. The numbers of H1N1 will increase over the next couple of months, mostly in people who are not vaccinated.
2. **The H1N1 vaccine is effective, safe, and highly recommended.** I will be getting it myself as soon as it is available. According to information as of October 20, the vaccine will be approved very soon, certainly by early November, and be available through Public Health Clinics throughout the Ottawa area. Algonquin Health Services will be requesting a supply of vaccine, but to start with it will be available only in public clinics.
3. **Priority for H1N1 vaccine is:** _____ for people providing health care to others, such as nursing students and instructors; for those with chronic conditions such as asthma; for pregnant women; and for children up to 5 years old.

4. **There is no difference in safety between vaccine with adjuvant or without it.** The first lots of vaccine have adjuvant in them, because it makes the vaccine work better. There will be vaccine without the adjuvant available eventually for pregnant women and small children, but the vaccine with adjuvant is equally safe for all. The adjuvant (squalene) is a natural substance that enhances immune response, and has been used in European vaccines for several years.
5. **Seasonal flu vaccine is available now in doctors' offices, but only for people over 65.** Young adults are strongly encouraged to get the H1N1 vaccine first instead, because H1N1 is the most common type of flu right now. The Seasonal vaccine will be available for all of us after Christmas, when the usual flu season is here.
6. **Serious side effects of flu vaccine are very rare.** About 1 in 10,000 people vaccinated will get a severe side effect from the vaccine. Many more than that will have severe illness from *not* getting vaccinated. (Guillain Barré syndrome is equally rare in people who have had the vaccine and those who have not, so don't avoid the vaccine for that reason.)
7. **Anti-virals, such as Tamiflu, are reserved for serious cases of influenza.** If you have the flu *and* have another chronic health problem, you are pregnant, or you are having shortness of breath, see a doctor within the first three days. Tamiflu is available in all pharmacies, but you need a prescription for it. It is not effective for prevention.
8. **Apart from the vaccine, the best protection is good hygiene.** Don't put your hands to your face unless you have just washed them. Wash before eating. Wash after touching common surfaces. Don't share drinking cups or bottles. Don't share smokes.
9. **Eat well, sleep well, exercise well, get the vaccine, and you will stay well.** High stress may weaken your immune system, so plan some recreation time regularly. Alcohol does not help. Tobacco does not help. Marijuana does not help. There are no proven herbal remedies, spinal manipulations, or horoscope observances that prevent influenza. Vaccine has been proven to help.
10. **If you are ill, especially with a fever, stay home.** It doesn't matter if it is Influenza or not, you will get better faster, and you will not infect other people.