For MTSU Students, Parents, and Faculty

Frequently Asked Questions

Do you test ill students for the H1N1 flu? We do a standard rapid office screening test for influenza A and B for each student with flu like symptoms. If a student has H1N1 we expect a positive screening test. However, all office tests for influenza are imperfect and may miss 30% or more of students with influenza. With such testing limits, students with *suspected* H1N1 influenza are still treated as if they have *confirmed* H1N1 influenza and will likely offer antiviral medication (see question on antivirals).

In addition to standard office testing we have become a Sentinel Provider for the US Surveillance Network and send a designated number of samples to their lab for H1N1 PCR testing (and possible cultures for antiviral sensitivities) as part of that program. However, these results are not immediately available. They are meant to aid the CDC and health departments in surveying the current influenza situation and in monitoring for changes in the H1N1 virus. This means, unfortunately, that results do not return in time to guide our recommendations to patients.

What do students do about class while they are ill? The CDC recommends that students stay out of class (and work) until they have no fever for 24 hours. So far, the typical patient has a fever for 2-4 days, which would equate to missing 3-5 days of school and work. MTSU Student Health will give a note to the student that verifies they have an illness consistent with H1N1 influenza. It is the students' responsibility to keep in contact with professors by email or phone regarding their situation, and to notify their workplace.

Should I go home to my family if I have H1N1 influenza? If a student has mild flu symptoms and is able to take care of his/her basic needs while ill, it is certainly fine to stay in the dorm or apartment here at MTSU. If a student is having a tough time meeting their basic needs while ill with the flu it is certainly fine to obtain care at home when flu symptoms are at their peak. However, please use sound judgment in this regard – if going home would put a relative with a serious medical problem such as emphysema at risk of catching the flu, it is not prudent to expose this relative to the risk of H1N1 influenza.

My roommate has the flu. I don't want to risk exposure. Can I be put in a separate room? Unfortunately, in a pandemic spread of the virus, it is possible to contract on campus in many locations. There is no additional housing on campus to separate sick and non-sick students, but we can offer well students a preventive dosing schedule of antiviral medications to take for 10 days to prevent catching the illness from their roommate.

Should I take antiviral medication such as Tamiflu or Relenza for the flu? With all the statements about antivirals in the above questions, it may seem a certainty that a person ill with the flu should take an antiviral for their illness, or should take an antiviral to prevent flu if exposed; but there does need to be some discussion about influenza medications. Antivirals do lower the severity of symptoms of the flu, reduce the duration of the influenza virus, and can be used to reduce the risk of contracting influenza if exposed. This improvement is seen both with H1N1 flu and typical seasonal flu.

However, last year's seasonal flu did show resistance to the antiviral Tamiflu. Viruses can become resistant to antivirals, just as bacteria become resistant to antibiotics.

The new H1N1 influenza has been found to be universally resistant to the older antivirals, Amantadine and Flumadine, but at this time, the virus is sensitive, in general, to the newer antivirals, Tamiflu and Relenza. (It should be mentioned that a few scattered cases of resistance to Tamiflu have been seen in different areas of the world already). Antiviral resistance is troubling and there is no perfect answer. We have many students, faculty, and staff in close proximity, as with any school setting. We are offering the medication at this time with the perspective that we may be able to contain spread somewhat until the H1N1 vaccine is available, but please realize antiviral medication is not always necessary to recover from the flu. Also, brand name antivirals such as Tamiflu are quite costly (especially if one is uninsured and paying the total price). The CDC's comments on antivirals even state: *Clinical judgment is an important factor in treatment decisions. Persons with suspected novel H1N1 influenza who present with an uncomplicated febrile illness typically do not require treatment unless they are at higher risk for influenza complications, and in areas with limited antiviral mediation availability, local public health authorities might provide additional guidance about prioritizing treatment within groups at higher risk for infection. (Source: http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/recommendations.htm)* At this time we are offering medication to all students, but that may have to change as circumstances change.

How does the H1N1 virus spread? The H1N1 virus is contracted in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses travel from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes individuals may become infected by touching their mouth or nose after touching an object harboring the influenza virus. (Source: www.flu.gov)

What are the best ways to protect myself from getting the H1N1 virus? MTSU Health Services advises students, their parents, and our faculty and staff to take the precautions outlined below to help themselves and others stay healthy. The following advice comes 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 immediately after use.
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 hands to avoid getting the flu? Washing your hands will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. We recommend that you wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- 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.

(Source: www.flu.gov)