

Mercy College of Health Sciences Plans and Standards for the Seasonal Flu Vaccination and General Education and Prevention Information for the Novel (H1N1) Flu for Students, 2009-10

UPDATE – November 23, 2009

In light of recent shortages of seasonal flu vaccine and the inability to ensure adequate supplies of the vaccine for the remainder of the current flu season, the decision has been made by Mercy Medical Center – Des Moines to suspend the requirement that Mercy College students obtain the seasonal flu vaccine as a condition of attending clinical rotations after December 1, 2009 on all Mercy campuses. (This change does not apply to other local medical centers.)

Students are strongly encouraged to obtain the flu vaccine as a best-practice for preventing infection if and when, additional vaccine is available in their local community, and are encouraged to provide documentation to the College health nurses for College tracking.

In addition, the use of surgical masks to prevent the spread of flu germs will not be required as previously outlined in this plan and standards, however, a limited supply of masks will be available from the College Receptionist throughout the remainder of the flu season to relieve concerns of anyone on our campus. In the event that public health officials declare a significant return of the flu to the local community, the use of masks in clinical settings may be resumed.

Please read sections of the plan highlighted below that are Suspended at this time.

I. Introduction

This document sets forth Mercy College of Health Science's ("Mercy College's") plans and standards relating to seasonal influenza vaccinations (referred to as the "flu vaccine" or "flu vaccination") and in addition general education and prevention information for the Novel (H1N1) Flu.

It is the responsibility of each student at Mercy College to know and adhere to the flu vaccination plans and standards.

II. General Education and Prevention of Seasonal and Novel (H1N1) Flu

A. Current Recommendations to Prevent the Spread of Flu by the Centers for Disease Control

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) continues to monitor and provide useful follow-up information on steps that individuals and businesses can take to reduce the impact of both the seasonal and novel influenza during the traditional flu season which has already begun in many areas of the country.

Because of the close proximity within health care and educational facilities and the potential exposure of their employees and students to individuals who may be carrying either virus or who could suffer severe reactions from exposure to either virus, and due to the fact that both viruses exhibit similar symptoms, there is significant value to ensure that as many health care workers and college students, as possible, obtain seasonal flu vaccinations to reduce the incidents and confusion between which influenza is present in a particular community, work, and/or school environment.

While there is apparently little symptomatic difference between the two influenza strains, there are nonetheless significant differences in the populations most at risk for severe complications. The seasonal flu has significant impact annually on those 65 years and older and individuals with weakened immune systems. The novel influenza on the other hand, appears to be having the greatest impact on the very young through those entering early adulthood. Some researchers believe that these population variations may be due to the fact that older individuals may have been exposed to an earlier strain of the novel influenza as recently as the late 1950s.

B. Symptoms of Influenza

According to the CDC, symptoms for both the seasonal influenza and the novel influenza are similar, but may differ in their severity. Symptoms include fever, coughing, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headaches, body aches, chills and fatigue. In H1N1 flu infection, vomiting and diarrhea may also occur.

Seasonal Flu	Novel Flu (H1N1)
All types of flu can cause: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever* • Coughing and/or sore throat • Runny or stuffy nose • Headaches and/or body aches • Chills • Fatigue 	Same as seasonal flu, but symptoms may be more severe. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever • Coughing and/or sore throat • Runny or stuffy nose • Headaches and/or body aches • Chills • Fatigue
* not everyone will have a fever	In addition to the above symptoms, a number of novel (H1N1) flu cases reported: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vomiting • Diarrhea

C. When Symptoms Warrant Additional Medical Attention

Get medical care right away if the sick person at home:

- has difficulty breathing or chest pain
- has purple or blue discoloration of the lips
- is vomiting and unable to keep liquids down
- has signs of dehydration such as dizziness when standing, absence of urination, or in infants, a lack of tears when they cry

- has seizures (for example, uncontrolled convulsions)
- is less responsive than normal or becomes confused
- fever that cannot be reduced with fever reducing agents, or reoccurrence of a fever.

D. Preventing the Contracting of the Flu and Limiting the Spread of the Disease

It is important for health care workers and those studying to become health care workers to demonstrate proper prevention techniques in order to reduce the spread of the seasonal and novel influenza. There are a number of steps that should be practiced routinely:

- Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of the tissue into a garbage can after each use. Use your shirt sleeve if you must to contain the airborne particles.
- Wash your hands with soap and water; remember to use friction as you wash to remove germs. Apply antibacterial soap for 15-20 seconds minimum.
- If soap and water are unavailable, use alcohol-based hand gel sanitizers -- especially after you cough or sneeze. Rub your hands with the gel until completely dry to achieve the benefit of the disinfectant.
- Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet, open the door to exit the bathroom, and drop the towel into the nearest garbage can after you leave the bathroom.
- Avoid the contact with ill persons, if possible.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds and other social distancing measures.
- Take good care of yourself now: Eat healthy, drink nutritious fluids, get plenty of rest and sleep, be physically active, and manage stress.
- Use disposable antimicrobial wipes, which will be found throughout the College, on surfaces that are safe for such use, including: telephones, keyboards, door handles, faucets, toilet flush handles, handrails, and elevator buttons. Dispose of these promptly after one use. Be aware that these wipes are harsh to our skin, and repeated exposure is irritating.
- In the event you are granted a waiver from obtaining the flu vaccine for clinical rotations, you will need to wear a surgical mask when on Mercy College property or the property of other medical centers in Des Moines throughout the flu season, beginning by December 1 (unless public health officials indicate that precautions are warranted earlier). Free surgical masks will be available at the Campus Receptionist desk in the Sullivan Center throughout the flu season.
- Surgical masks should be changed as often as they become moist (due to talking, breathing or coughing).

For more information on the seasonal or novel influenza, visit the CDC's specific website for regular influenza updates, at <http://www.flu.gov/>.

III. Mercy College Students – Responsibility for Promoting a Culture of Safety

As a result of the combined potential that health science students will encounter patients who may have flu symptoms during hands-on clinical rotations and the fact that many health science students are at potentially higher risk for contracting novel influenza, the CDC has encouraged heightened awareness on health science college campuses this academic year.

Vaccination Policy for 2009-2010. Mercy Medical Center in preparation for this flu season has made the decision – in conjunction with other medical centers in the Des Moines area – to promote a **Culture of Safety** for its patients by **offering free seasonal flu vaccination** for all employees, and for the first time, **for all Mercy College students**. Mercy College strongly encourages all students to participate in this program. **(Suspended) Students enrolled in clinical education are required to obtain a seasonal flu vaccination before December 1, 2009, unless they have obtained a waiver as described below.** Students not enrolled in clinical education will not be required to obtain the vaccination as a condition of enrollment but are strongly urged to do so.

Vaccination Policy for 2010-2011. Mercy College intends to make the seasonal flu vaccination policy mandatory for all students beginning in the 2010-2011 academic year. More information will be provided as appropriate.

Alternatives for Declining the Seasonal Flu Vaccine for 2009-2010. **(Suspended) Students engaged in clinical education that, for religious or medical reasons, do not wish to or cannot receive a seasonal flu vaccination, will be required to complete an “Influenza Vaccination Reasonable Accommodation Request Form” in order to be considered for waiver from participating in the distribution of seasonal flu vaccinations.**

(Suspended) Copies of the form are available from the Campus Receptionist. Forms must be submitted to the student health nurses by November 1, 2009 along with supporting documentation noted on the form, which will be forwarded on to the Employee Health Department at Mercy Medical Center. Requests for waiver will be reviewed by a medical center committee of experts for approval. Students will be notified of their decision before December 1, 2009.

(Suspended) If a waiver is granted, students engaged in clinical rotations will be required to wear a surgical mask while on the Mercy College or medical center campus for clinical rotations during the time frame identified by Mercy Medical Center based on influenza activity in our state (beginning no later than December 1, 2009).

Masks will be available free of charge from the Campus Receptionist, located in the Sullivan Center, throughout the flu season. **(Suspended at Mercy) Students who are granted a waiver for the seasonal flu vaccine will be required to wear a mask while on any Mercy campus (College or Medical Center) as well as other local health care facilities throughout the remainder of the flu season.**

Flu Vaccination Clinics on Our Campus: **(Suspended) The College will offer seasonal flu vaccinations on the College campus at various times throughout the months of October and November as serum is made available, during published Flu Vaccination Clinic Days. News of**

these on-campus clinics will be announced by student email, campus monitors and on bulletin boards throughout the campus. Students will be required to show their student badge in order to obtain a free flu vaccination. All vaccinations must be obtained before December 1, 2009 in order for students enrolled in clinical rotations to continue to participate in those experiences on any Des Moines area medical center campus. Students, who have obtained a seasonal flu vaccination elsewhere, will be required to provide documentation of the vaccination to the student health nurses before December 1, 2009.

(Suspended) Additional seasonal flu vaccination clinics will be offered as part of New Student Orientation & Registrations Sessions for students enrolling for the first time in January 2010 and registered for a clinical course as serum is made available, and may be offered for summer 2010 New Student Orientations & Registrations sessions depending on the length of the flu season as determined by public health officials.

Changes in Housekeeping: For the coming flu season, Mercy College environmental services employees will increase their review of existing waterless gel stations across all College buildings, and increase the number available as needed. Further, spray bottles of disinfectant solution will be located in each classroom, skills laboratory and computer laboratory for individuals to use prior to touching work surfaces. Routine cleaning schedules will include monitoring the availability of spray bottles throughout the campus. In addition, cleaning routines will include disinfecting of door handles, toilet handles and elevator buttons.

Consequences for Failing to Promote a Culture of Safety: (Suspended) Students enrolled in clinical education who fail to obtain a seasonal flu vaccination by December 1, 2009 and have not been granted a waiver, will be excluded from further participation in clinical rotations at applicable Des Moines area medical centers for the remainder of the seasonal flu season. Failure to complete clinical rotations in December may impact grades and promotion to the next academic semester.

(Suspended) New and returning students who do not have documentation of either a flu vaccination or waiver will not be allowed to enroll in clinical coursework.

Policy for Absence from Classroom Lectures or Skills Laboratories: A student who shows symptoms commonly associated with seasonal flu should self-isolate and refrain from attending classes in order to limit the spread of the disease to other members of the class or instructor(s). In the event this would result in an absence from classroom lectures or participation in skills lab sessions, the student will be required to go online to the College website and electronically complete a “Flu Self-report Form” and submit it noting all classroom teachers’ whose lectures/skills labs the student will miss. The absence from class for a reported case of the flu will only count as one (1) occurrence (regardless of the number of days a student is away). The classroom teachers will then communicate with the student electronically to determine what areas of class content the student can and should make-up while the student is away from the classroom.

It is the student’s obligation to follow-up with classroom teachers to ensure that required missed content is completed as outlined in course syllabi. Failure to complete required make-up content

may lead to a lower grade or failure of the course. The student with computer access should send the form by email for each day they are absent with flu symptoms.

Policy for Absence from Clinical Rotations: A student who shows symptoms commonly associated with seasonal flu should self-isolate and refrain from attending clinical rotations in order to limit the spread of the disease to patients or other health care workers. In the event that this would result in an absence from clinical rotations, you will be required to go online to the College website and electronically complete a “Flu Self-report Form” and submit it noting your clinical instructor. The absence from a clinical rotation for a reported case of the flu will only count as one (1) occurrence (regardless of the number of clinical rotations you are away). Make-up fees associated with clinical rotation absences will only be charged once during a bout of flu this academic year. Repeated bouts of the flu will result in additional clinical fees being charged in the same manner. Your clinical instructor will then communicate with you electronically to determine how you should plan to make-up missed clinical experiences.

It is the student’s obligation to follow-up with clinical instructors to ensure that required missed content is completed as outlined in course syllabi. Failure to complete required make-up content from clinical rotations may lead to a lower grade or failure of the course. The student with computer access should send the form by email for each day they are absent with flu symptoms.

Reporting Procedures for Students without Home Computer Access: Students who do not have access at home to a computer to report a flu illness should stop by the Campus Receptionist workstation to pick up paper copies of the “Flu Self-report Form” so that they may have them at home in case they are absent. These students will need to contact all instructors as outlined in course syllabi to inform them that they will be absent at the beginning of the illness and in advance of return to class/skills labs/clinical rotations. The “Flu Self-report Form” should be submitted to the College student health office upon return to class as outlined in this document, in order to comply with reporting requirements for the incidence of flu absences.

Procedures for Students Enrolled in Online-only and Web-assist Distance Learning Courses: Students enrolled in online-only courses, who do not need to visit a Mercy campus (College or Medical Center) as part of the coursework, are excluded from any requirement to obtain a free seasonal flu vaccination in those semesters. **(Suspended) Should on-campus courses be required for Spring 2010 for example, these students would need to participate in a free vaccination clinic.**

Determining When to Return to School: The CDC recommends that individuals with influenza-like illness remain at home and away from other people until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications. This could take from 2-5 days based on recent experience this flu season.

Mercy College will not require a medical doctor’s note to return to class or clinical rotations following a bout of the flu. Students should send an electronic “Flu Self-report Form” to their instructors and the College student health nurses the night before their anticipated return to class. Students do not need to visit the College student health nurses for permission to return to class or clinical rotations for absences caused by the flu this academic year.

IV. Leadership for Mercy College Flu Plan, Monitoring and Reporting

- Anne Dennis, Human Resources Business Partner, 643-6640, will coordinate with Mercy's Human Resources and Employee Health offices for all aspects of monitoring and reporting of the College employees' response to the Seasonal and Novel Flu Plans.
- Joni Cowden, R.N., Student Health Nurse, 643-6631, will coordinate all aspects of monitoring and reporting of the College students' response to the Seasonal and Novel Flu Plans.

[BELIN\M1206\0000\Flu Vaccination Policy \(00550241\).DOC](#)