

Red River College - H1N1 Influenza Update - September 1, 2009

The following information has been prepared to update Red River College staff and students with information on RRC's Pandemic Influenza preparations, as well as to provide details about influenza and steps each person can take to protect themselves and help prevent the spread of the virus.

Pandemic Planning began at RRC in the spring with the first outbreak of the H1N1 virus. A new Pandemic Influenza Plan was approved in June and is part of the College's Emergency Response Plan. A copy of the plan will be posted on the RRC website shortly.

Please regularly check the RRC website for information and updates. In addition, new material may be distributed through All-Staff or All-Student email notification.

Monitoring:

Under the new Pandemic Plan, the impact of a potential fall pandemic will be monitored to assess the impact on College operations. As a result, beginning this fall, absenteeism rates will be tracked for both students and staff. Instructors will collect daily information on the number of students absent from class. Please note that we will be assessing the number of students absent, not names. The information will be forwarded by instructors to their respective Chairs or Deans. An attendance form has been created for instructors use.

In addition, Managers, Chairs and Department heads are requested to forward information on staff absenteeism to Human Resources. This can be done by email, and should be done daily. Again we are not looking for names, but rather the number of employees who may be affected by the fall flu season.

Staff or students who become ill with flu-like symptoms are requested to stay home until they are no longer sick. The CDC advises people to remain home until 24 hours after your fever subsides. Instructors who become ill are requested to speak with their Chair or Dean, and to suggest material from the course curriculum which can be covered in their absence. All attempts are being made to maintain academic programs in the case of instructor illness.

College operations will continue as normal throughout the fall flu season. However, in the unlikely event that a pandemic results in the Government of Manitoba issuing an order that Colleges and Universities temporarily cease operations, then ALL academic programs at Red River College will be shut down. This also applies to Continuing and Distance Education programs.

The Academic Pandemic Planning Sub-committee has determined that the majority of programs at Red River College could absorb a temporary closure without complete loss of the academic year. However, there may be a significant impact on some short-term programs or courses. Every attempt will be made to make up the time and material if and when possible.

Cleaning and Maintenance:

With the first outbreak of H1N1 influenza earlier this year, Red River College's cleaning staff stepped up efforts to sanitize surfaces that regularly come into human contact. Additional staff have been brought in to continue this effort on a nightly basis; cleaning doors, door handles, railings, elevator buttons, phones and drinking fountains. Additional cleaning efforts are also being conducted at regional campuses to the best of our abilities.

However, during the day these surfaces are touched by hundreds or even thousands of people. **All students and staff are urged to wash their hands regularly.** If you open a door or touch a common surface with your hand you should wash your hands or use a hand sanitizer before touching your face or rubbing your eyes. If there is not a bottle of hand sanitizer in your area, then people are urged to carry their own personal bottles of sanitizer.

All staff are reminded that Red River College's cleaning and maintenance staff do not clean office desktops, computer keyboards or phones. These are the responsibility of the user. It is a good idea to clean those surfaces every week or so. If you share equipment or work stations it is always a good practice to wipe down surfaces when you arrive. *PerCept™*, *Virox* and *Acce/™* wipes are moist one-use towels that have been proven to kill germs when the wiped surface is left to dry five minutes before using it. The wipes are non-corrosive, are not irritating to skin/eyes, have no fragrances and are non-toxic. These products are to be used on hard surfaces, and not as a wipe for skin.

If you use shared equipment or space, and do not have wipes available you should speak to your supervisor. Red River College will be ordering a small supply of disinfectant wipes. (*each container contains 160 wipes*) Individuals may wish to wipe down their phones, desks or computer keyboards once a week or so, while individuals sharing workstations may wish to wipe them down between users.

Departments who require a container of disinfectant wipes for their area should have their supervisor or manager contact the Emergency Preparedness Coordinator at 632-3075, or by email at [daclarke@rrc.mb.ca].

Protect yourself and others:

The World Health Organization's decision to go to pandemic alert level six has not changed Manitoba's response to H1N1 flu. The same basic measures that have already been recommended and implemented are still the best defence against H1N1 flu, no matter where you are or who you are with.

If you have symptoms of a respiratory infection, you should:

- Stay home from school or work and limit unnecessary contact with others.
- Contact your health-care provider or visit your nearest health-care centre if you are concerned that you may need care – especially if your symptoms are severe or worsening (e.g. shortness of breath, dehydration, or worsening fever, cough or weakness).

Whether you have flu symptoms or not, you should:

- Cover your cough by coughing into your elbow or sleeve or use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Hand sanitizers are also effective.
- Reduce the spread of germs by limiting touching your eyes, nose or mouth and by washing your hands frequently.
- Maintain your health by taking care of yourself and those in your care including eating a healthy balanced diet, avoiding cigarette smoke and other harmful substances, being active and getting enough rest and sleep.

For personal advice on self-care or when to seek further care, Manitobans who cannot contact their primary health-care provider can phone Health Links-Info Sante at any time at 788-8200 or toll-free at 1-888-315-9257.

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is influenza (the flu)?

Influenza is a respiratory disease caused by a virus. It can cause a variety of symptoms, such as fever, cough, aches and physical exhaustion. People usually recover from the flu without medical help. However, very young children and the elderly have a higher risk of severe illness, as well as people with lowered immunity (ex: those with chronic illnesses).

Everyone should be vigilant of the symptoms of influenza, in particular of when to seek medical assistance.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza spreads easily from person to person by coughing or sneezing respiratory droplets into the air. It is also spread by hand-to-hand contact with an infected person, or after handling objects contaminated by infected people. The virus can survive on hard surfaces for up to 48 hours, on cloth, paper or tissue for up to 12 hours and on hands for about five minutes, long enough for you to inadvertently touch your mouth, nose or eyes and transfer the virus to your body.

People can spread influenza up to 24 hours before symptoms appear and up to seven days after. Not everyone who gets influenza develops symptoms but they still may be able to spread it to others, especially if they cough or sneeze.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Symptoms of influenza include:

- sudden fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or higher,
- cough, **AND**
- one or more of the following: sore throat, muscle aches, or physical exhaustion.
- Children may also feel sick to their stomach, vomit or have diarrhea, but these symptoms are uncommon in adults.
- Elderly people and people with lowered immunity may not develop a fever.

How do I know if I have a fever?

Fever is a sign that the body is fighting an infection or other illness. You have a fever if body temperature is 38°C (100.4°F) or higher.

Should I be wearing a face mask?

Manitoba Health and Healthy Living and the Public Health Agency of Canada do not recommend that healthy people wear masks as they go about their daily routines. There is no evidence that wearing a mask will prevent the spread of infection in the general population. People who are in close contact with someone who is sick with flu, like doctors, nurses and caregivers at home, may be asked to wear a face mask to protect them from the virus.

How long does the flu last?

The Centre for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that people with influenza-like illness remain at home until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100° F [37.8°C]), or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.

Epidemiologic data collected during spring 2009 found that most people with the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus who were not hospitalized had a fever that lasted 2 to 4 days; this would require an exclusion period of **3 to 5 days** in most cases.

Sick individuals should **stay at home until the end of the exclusion period**, to the extent possible, except when necessary to seek required medical care. Sick individuals should avoid contact with others.

Many people with influenza illness will continue shedding influenza virus 24 hours after their fevers go away, but at lower levels than during their fever. Shedding of influenza virus, as detected by RT-PCR, can be detected for 10 days or more in some cases. Therefore, when people who have had influenza-like illness return to work, school, or other community settings they should **continue to practice good respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene and avoid close contact with people they know to be at increased risk of influenza-related complications**.

Because some people may shed influenza virus before they feel ill, and because some people with influenza will not have a fever, it is important that all people **cover their cough and wash hands often**. To lessen the chance of spreading influenza viruses that are resistant to antiviral medications, adherence to good respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene is as important for people taking antiviral medications as it is for others.

Fever-reducing medications, that is, medications containing acetaminophen or ibuprofen, are appropriate for use in individuals with influenza-like illness. Aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) should not be given to children or teenagers who have influenza; this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome. The determination of readiness to return to school, businesses, or other community settings should be made when at least 24 hours have passed since the ill person's temperature first remained normal without the use of these medications.

Pregnant Women and the Flu

Pregnant women are no more, or less susceptible than all others to getting the flu. However, Public Health of Canada Agency advises "*if they do catch the (H1N1) flu virus, they are more*

likely to suffer complications like pneumonia and severe respiratory distress which can put both the mother and baby's health at risk."

Health Canada's steps to protect the health of pregnant women appear below. Advise your supervisor if you are pregnant, he/she will be assess your work environment with an aim to mitigate any potential risk that might exist.

Practice good basic hygiene

It is particularly important for pregnant workers to follow all the basic infection control measures; hand washing/using sanitizer, covering your cough/sneeze, keeping work surfaces clean and disinfected, staying home and checking with your doctor if you become ill.

Consider avoiding crowds

Continue with your daily life, but take caution when entering situations where there are many people in close quarters with little control over personal contact.

Know what to look for

Symptoms of the (H1N1) flu virus may include but are not limited to: rapid onset of fever, cough, sore throat, wheezing, and fatigue. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also occur. Fever may not be prominent.

Talk to a medical professional if you have flu-like symptoms, and seek care if symptoms worsen

The risk of complications is greater in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. Early treatment can help to reduce the risk of complications, so it's important that pregnant women speak to a medical professional as soon as you start to develop flu symptoms, and seek medical care if the symptoms worsen.