

Flu Facts  
H1N1 (Swine) Flu

**What is influenza (“the flu”)?**

Influenza, commonly called “the flu”, is caused by influenza viruses, which infect the respiratory tract (nose, throat, lungs). Influenza usually comes on suddenly, and symptoms may include fever, headache, fatigue, dry cough, sore throat, nasal congestion and body aches. Nausea and diarrhea are also sometimes present with influenza, but if these are the only symptoms present, a stomach virus, not influenza is the likely diagnosis. Flu viruses flourish in cooler environments, so each year “seasonal” flu appears in the northern hemisphere beginning in late fall and lasting into early spring.

**What’s different about H1N1 (swine) flu?**

Unlike seasonal flu, H1N1 flu, which was first diagnosed in Mexico last winter, is a novel influenza virus that has not been previously seen. Its “novelty” contributes to its ability to spread very rapidly as most people will not have developed any protective immunity to it. Its novelty may also explain why, unlike seasonal flu, H1N1 has disproportionately affected younger people. Nearly two-thirds of people affected have been below the age of 18. Public health officials expect that both seasonal and H1N1 flu will be present this winter, and that many young people are likely to get the H1N1 variety.

The symptoms of H1N1 flu are very much like the symptoms of seasonal flu. Like seasonal flu, complications from H1N1 such as pneumonia, dehydration and worsening of chronic medical conditions such as asthma can occur, and rarely these complications can lead to death.

**How is H1N1 flu spread?**

H1N1 flu, like all flu, is spread when a person who has the flu coughs, sneezes or speaks and sends the flu virus into the air through droplets that settle on nearby surfaces. Flu is spread when someone touches the surface that has flu virus on it and then touches his or her mouth, eye or nose.

**Can flu be prevented? What about flu vaccine?**

Flu vaccines offer the best available protection. The College advises students, staff and faculty to be immunized against both seasonal flu and H1N1 flu, which will require separate immunizations.

As seasonal flu vaccine becomes available to the College, the College will continue to offer vaccine free of charge to students, staff and faculty. As of this writing in early

October, there is a shortage of seasonal flu vaccine. Should the shortage persist, priority for any limited vaccine received at the College will be given first to students. Since the supply is uncertain, students, faculty and staff should consider other sources for obtaining seasonal flu shots including individual health care providers or commercial establishments such as CVS or Walgreens.

The H1N1 flu vaccine has just been released to the states by the federal government. As supplies of vaccine are made available, the Commonwealth will allocate vaccine to health care providers based on availability and need. At Simmons we hope to have enough vaccine to be able to offer free immunizations to all students beginning in early November although again, available supply may dictate prioritizing students. Depending on state guidelines and availability of vaccine, we may be able to offer a free H1N1 flu clinic to faculty and staff as well. As soon as we have more definitive information, we will pass it on to the community.

### **Is the H1N1 flu vaccine safe?**

Each year a new seasonal flu vaccine is developed to meet the particular strain of flu that is expected to be circulating during the fall and winter. Before it is made available to the public, the vaccine undergoes extensive clinical trials to test its effectiveness and safety. Seasonal flu vaccines have an excellent safety record. The vaccine for H1N1, a new strain of flu, was developed and tested in the same way that other flu vaccines are developed and tested and the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has determined that it is safe as well.

Occasionally side effects will occur with any vaccine, including soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given. Very rarely fainting, headache, muscle aches, fever, and nausea might also occur. Since the vaccine is grown in eggs, people with allergies to eggs shouldn't receive the vaccine. As is the case with receiving any vaccine, its best to wait in the provider's office or clinic 10 to 15 minutes after receiving the vaccine to be sure fainting does not occur.

For more detailed information about vaccine safety you can consult the following sites:

[http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/vaccine\\_safety\\_qa.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/vaccine_safety_qa.htm)

[http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/cdc/flu/vaccine\\_safety.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/cdc/flu/vaccine_safety.pdf)

### **What else can be done to prevent getting H1N1 flu or giving it to others?**

In addition to vaccine, there are simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family from getting the H1N1 flu:

- **Hand hygiene is the best protection. Wash your hands with soap and warm water, or use an alcohol based hand rub or gel often, especially before you eat, after visiting public places or after being in contact with anyone with a cold or the flu.** You might also want to wipe down equipment that you use in

public places, such as computers. Wipes will be available at the College for this purpose.

- Don't share items that you put in your mouth such as drinking cups, straws or utensils
- To protect others, if you have a cough or feel a sneeze coming on, cover your mouth or nose with a tissue. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve, not on your hands, to prevent spreading the virus

### **How do I know if I have H1N1 flu?**

The flu can be difficult to distinguish from other respiratory illnesses, including colds. In addition, a definitive laboratory test for H1N1 is not generally available and in any case, results would take too long to obtain to be useful in treating most cases. Thus when triaging patients with flu-like symptoms, health care providers make a diagnosis of influenza like illness (ILI) on the basis of reported symptoms. Primary symptoms of the illness include sudden onset of symptoms, fever greater than 100°, cough, sore throat and body aches.

### **If I think I have the flu should I go to my doctor's office or the emergency room?**

It is usually not necessary to go to the emergency room or even to see a health care provider if you have the flu, but if you suspect that you have the flu you should definitely call your provider to discuss your symptoms so that a decision can be made about whether or not you need to be seen. If you are a Simmons student, call the Health Center at 617-521-1020. The Simmons Health Center has a nurse practitioner or physician on call whenever it is closed. If you are a member of the staff or faculty, contact your personal health care provider for advice.

### **Do I need to notify anyone if I have been diagnosed with the flu?**

Yes. If you are a Simmons student, even if you have been diagnosed elsewhere, please call the Health Center at 617-521-1020 and report your illness if you have not already done so. If you are a faculty or staff member, you will need to notify your supervisor since you will be absent from work.

### **If I get the flu, how long will I be sick?**

For most people, the illness lasts from 3-5 days assuming no complications develop. During that period, rest, drink plenty of liquids and avoid using alcohol and tobacco. Use acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil) or naproxen (Aleve) to relieve symptoms. If you are an undergraduate student, it's important not to take aspirin, since aspirin can cause a rare but serious illness in young people with influenza. The Health Center has

more specific instructions to students for managing illness available at [http://my.simmons.edu/services/health/docs/Instructions\\_for\\_students\\_with\\_flu.pdf](http://my.simmons.edu/services/health/docs/Instructions_for_students_with_flu.pdf)

### **How long will I be out from school or work?**

If you think that you have the flu or are told by a health care provider that you probably do, you will be asked to stay home from work or school for four days following the onset of your symptoms or until you have been fever free for 24 hours without having taken medication to lower fever, whichever is later. If you are a student in a clinical placement, you will need to be absent from your clinical site for seven days or until you have been fever-free for 24 hours with use of medication to lower fever, whichever is later.

### **Has the College been making any special plans for the arrival of H1N1 flu?**

Yes. The College Emergency Response Team meets regularly to discuss plans for managing the H1N1 virus on campus. To date, we have had about 25 student cases of influenza-like illness which are likely to have been caused by the H1N1 virus. In making plans, the College is following the guidelines of the Boston Public Health Commission and also monitoring closely guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. (See below for their web addresses.)

In accordance with those guidelines, the College strongly recommends that students with influenza like illness (ILI) go home whenever possible. The College also makes arrangements to isolate students who cannot be sent home. Other plans include having procedures in place for professors to be notified about student illnesses, ensuring that plenty of supplies including alcohol based hand cleaners are on hand and that soap is available in all public bathrooms including bathrooms in the residence halls, and that the Health Center has adequate staff to manage any outbreak. The College continues to send regular communications to the entire community including students, staff, faculty and parents with updated information on obtaining immunizations, the status of the outbreak should it occur, and more specific tips on managing illness.

For more information about H1N1, visit the Health Center web pages:

[www.my.simmons.edu/services/health](http://www.my.simmons.edu/services/health) or the following public health websites: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu> , <http://www.mass.gov/dph>, and [www.bphc.org/swineflu](http://www.bphc.org/swineflu).

