

Parent's Questions and Answers—Preparing for Influenza at Penn-September 2009

Have there been any reported cases of H1N1 flu at Penn? What is the status of the infected students?

There have been a small number of flu cases reported throughout this summer and as we begin the semester. Public health officials do not always test for novel H1N1 influenza because any flu circulating during the summer weather was likely to be novel H1N1 influenza. All students reporting influenza-like illness over the summer at Penn have recovered.

Once classes for undergraduates begin, Penn will provide regular updates on the flu including the number of students reporting influenza-like illness.

What happens if my son or daughter gets sick with flu?

Students should call Student Health Service at 215-746-3535 to speak with a health care provider to discuss their symptoms and get treatment advice. We want students to call rather than visit SHS in person to reduce the spread of the illness (this follows CDC infection control guidance).

In addition, we are providing following advice to students if they are sick with flu:

- Students should stay home from class, work, and social activities.
- Students should contact their instructors via email or phone to make arrangements to make up missed work. Penn instructors know students will be told to stay home from class if they have the flu and will work with students to make up work.
- If the illness lasts longer than a week, students should contact the advising office in their school to discuss their situation.

What happens if the symptoms get worse? How will sick students be monitored?

Sick students who feel worse should call Student Health Services immediately to talk to a doctor or nurse. If it is a medical emergency, students should call Penn Emergency number immediately: 215/573-3333 or 511 (from any campus phone).

Sick students on campus will be contacted daily by their RA/GA to monitor their progress and make sure they are getting what they need.

What happens if my son or daughter gets sick after Student Health Service is closed?

Student Health Service always has a health care provider on call. Students who have severe flu symptoms and need to speak to a provider after hours should call Student Health Service at 215-746-3535. After regular hours, they may follow the instructions to page the on call provider.

How will my son or daughter get food and medicine?

Dining will make it easy for a friend, roommate, or RA/GA to pick up food at any dining hall for a sick student. Our dietitians have prepared special menus for students who are ill with the flu.

Students who do not have a dining plan can purchase a special one-week plan if they become sick.

We will have special flu care packs (flu treatment information, fever reducing medicine, disposable thermometers) available in the College Houses for sick students.

What if I want to bring my son or daughter home to recover?

While our health care providers and college house staff are great, nothing beats Mom and Dad's care when you are sick. If they are able, parents are encouraged to pick up sick students and take them home to recover. The CDC advises sick people to avoid public transportation, so travel by private car is the best option.

For those who live too far away to make going home an option, rest assured we will do everything we can to keep sick students comfortable and get them on the road to recovery.

What if my son or daughter's roommate gets sick with flu?

Those sharing close living spaces are likely to have already been exposed to the flu virus because the virus sheds 24 hours prior to the appearance of symptoms. To help limit the spread of the flu, Housing will not be moving well roommates out of the room if their roommate gets sick. Not everyone who is exposed gets sick.

- Students should talk to the RA/GA or House Dean about any concerns regarding their living space.
- Students should contact SHS if they have any medical questions about being exposed to someone with flu.

What is Penn doing to communicate with faculty and staff regarding the flu? Is Penn ensuring that employees with flu don't come to campus and spread the infection to students?

We issued a report this week, *Preparing for Influenza at Penn*, which offers guidance to students, faculty, and staff about influenza. That guidance includes clear instructions to employees to stay home if they are sick with flu and guidance to supervisors to send sick employees home if they become ill at work.

What are three things parents should do to prepare for influenza at Penn?

- Talk to your son or daughter now about what would happen if he or she became ill with the flu.
- Buy flu prevention supplies (for example, tissues, disposable wipes, hand sanitizer) and flu care products (cold/flu medicine, thermometers).
- Subscribe to our flu update service for parents, available at www.upenn.edu/flu.

How will Penn notify me if my son or daughter is sick?

Penn notifies parents as soon as possible if their son or daughter has been hospitalized due to an injury or illness. You should strongly encourage your son or daughter to provide parent's cell phone numbers in UPennAlert to make sure we don't have problems reaching you in case of emergency.

A case of flu is unlikely to be an emergency. We expect students to contact their parents if they become ill. You should discuss your expectations if your son or daughter becomes ill. I think a phone call home each day when a student is sick is a reasonable expectation.

When will the vaccine be available to students? Will it be free? Will it be mandatory?

There are two flu vaccines. The seasonal flu vaccine will be available to students soon. The H1N1 vaccine is in production now and will be available, we hope, starting in October.

Student Health Service will receive the vaccines from the government and will provide them to students free of charge. The vaccines will not be mandatory for Penn students, although students in health professional programs such as Nursing may be required to be vaccinated because of their work in clinical settings.

Would Penn ever cancel classes, campus events, or athletic events because of the flu?

At this time, public health officials are not recommending that educational institutions suspend classes or cancel large gatherings. However, it is possible that Penn would suspend classes prior to a major outbreak in order to limit the spread of influenza.

If we did suspend classes, students who could make arrangements to go home would do so. Those who remained on campus would continue to have access to dining, health service, and housing.

Would Penn consider canceling/forfeiting athletic events at institutions where flu outbreaks have been reported? Would events be canceled on the Penn campus involving students from institutions where flu outbreaks have been reported?

Penn follows the guidance of public health officials in determining whether or not to cancel athletic events due to flu outbreak. At Penn, the Philadelphia Public Health Department is the public health authority. Doctors from the Student Health Service and the University of Pennsylvania Health System are in regular contact with that office regarding influenza. They would guide the decision to cancel an event for public health reasons.

Are hand sanitizers going to be installed in the college houses or other buildings on campus?

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers have become a new fact of life on campus. We are exploring the possibility of installing dispensers in locations where soap and water are not available.

Will the Student Health Service prescribe Tamiflu or other antiviral medication to students?

In keeping with current guidelines from the CDC and other public health officials, Student Health Service will prescribe antiviral medications on a limited, case-by-case basis, to those who are severely ill or at risk for complications: pregnant or have underlying health conditions (severe asthma, diabetes, HIV disease, immune deficiency). Questions should be directed to SHS.

Has Penn considered moving students infected with flu to special dormitories? Why isn't Penn offering non-infected roommates of students with flu the opportunity to move to alternate housing?

Penn's primary concern is to prevent the spread of flu on campus. We have consulted with public health officials and have been advised that there is no public health reason to ask infected students to move to alternate locations on campus. With regard to roommates, experts have said that those infected with flu are contagious 1-2 days before they begin to develop symptoms, meaning that healthy roommates likely will have been exposed to the virus before their roommates become visibly ill. We considered these issues carefully in deciding to keep sick students and their roommates who have been exposed to the flu in their own room, rather than relocate them to another building.