

MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

Office of Human Resources

Frequently Asked Questions about H1N1 and Seasonal Influenza: A Resource for Montgomery College Employees

What is H1N1 Influenza?

Novel influenza A (H1N1) is a new flu virus of swine origin that first caused illness in Mexico and the United States in March and April, 2009. It's thought that novel influenza A (H1N1) flu spreads in the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread, mainly through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with the virus, but it may also be spread by touching infected objects and then touching your nose or mouth. Novel H1N1 infection has been reported to cause a wide range of flu-like symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. In addition, many people also have reported nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea.

Who is at risk?

Both with seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu, certain individuals are at high risk of serious complications. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this novel H1N1 flu has caused greater disease burden in people younger than 25 years of age than older people. However, pregnancy and other previously recognized high risk medical conditions from seasonal influenza appear to be associated with increased risk of complications from this novel H1N1. These underlying conditions include asthma, diabetes, suppressed immune systems, heart disease, kidney disease, neurocognitive, and neuromuscular disorders.

Is there a vaccine for H1N1 and seasonal flu?

There is a vaccine for seasonal flu, and it is currently available. Vaccines are the most powerful public health tool for control of influenza, and the U.S. government is working closely with manufacturers to take steps in the process to manufacture a 2009 H1N1 vaccine. Working together with scientists in the public and private sector, CDC has isolated the new H1N1 virus and modified the virus so that it can be used to make hundreds of millions of doses of vaccine. The 2009 H1N1 vaccine started to be shipped to individual states in early October.

What is Montgomery College doing to prevent the potential spread of H1N1 virus?

Montgomery College has developed a H1N1 Education and Prevention Program. We encourage all members of the College community to review the program, assist in the implementation, and follow the guidelines for preparedness and prevention. Specific information about the program can be found on the Montgomery College Emergency Web site at: <http://montgomerycollege.edu/emergency>. In addition, regular updates pertaining to H1N1 Influenza are published by the Director of Emergency Planning via Inside MC Online at: <http://insidemc.montgomerycollege.edu>. Further, this publication is provided by the Office of Human Resources and is accessible via the OHR Web site at: <http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/ohr>.

What can I do to prevent the flu?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the best way to protect against the flu is to get vaccinated. Further, some of the most important measures to avoid the flu are:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. The use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with an alcohol content of 60% or better) is an appropriate alternative.

- Always cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue and immediately throw the tissue away in a proper receptacle. As an alternative, cough or sneeze into the inside of the elbow.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, as germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

Where can I find more information about preventing the flu?

For more information about how you can prevent the flu, visit the CDC H1N1 Website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu>), www.flu.gov, or call 800-CDC-INFO.

What are the symptoms of H1N1 or seasonal influenza?

The symptoms of the flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, and in some cases gastrointestinal upset. (It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever). For more information on the symptoms, emergency warning signs, and those at high risk, visit: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu, www.flu.gov, or call 800-CDC-INFO.

What should I do if I become sick?

The work ethic of Montgomery College employees is commendable, and we are all tempted to keep plugging away at our jobs even if we are feeling ill. But the truth is that you aren't doing yourself, your co-workers, or the institution any favors by coming to work when you have a fever and other flu symptoms. If you do become ill, you should not come to work. Consult your personal physician or contact the nurse line associated with your current health plan. As with any absence, you should promptly notify your supervisor that you will not be at work and the reason for the absence. You must also keep your supervisor informed of your condition or situation and your anticipated return to work date.

If I become sick at work can my supervisor make me leave work?

An employee will not ordinarily be sent home unless he or she is exhibiting multiple symptoms. The decision to send home an employee exhibiting multiple symptoms will be made on a case by case basis in consultation with the Office of Human Resources. Your supervisor can send you home because persons who become ill with the symptoms of influenza should immediately minimize contact with others to avoid transmission of the disease. According to the CDC, staying at home means that you should not leave your home except to seek medical care. This means avoiding normal activities, including work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings.

What if I become ill and am unable to contact my supervisor?

It's very important to keep your supervisor informed. If you are unable to contact your supervisor because you are incapacitated or caring for an incapacitated family member, please ask another family member or a friend to contact your supervisor as soon as possible.

What if I'm not sick, but do not want to come to work for fear of becoming ill. Is my supervisor required to approve my leave request?

It is important to educate yourself about the H1N1 virus, seasonal influenza, and their transmission. For further information visit: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu, www.flu.gov, or call 800-CDC-INFO. You may request to take leave; however, your supervisor is not required to approve your leave request.

What type of leave is available to me in the case of this H1N1 influenza outbreak or pandemic?

All applicable forms of leave may be considered for use in the event of an influenza outbreak or pandemic. Employees unable to report to work as a result of personal or family illness are expected to cover those absences in accordance with leave policies, procedures, and bargaining agreements in place. This includes leave without pay to care for oneself, an employee's spouse, son, daughter, or parent, subject to the provisions of the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). For further information on College leave programs and FMLA eligibility, please see the following links accordingly:

College Policy and Procedure 35003/35003CP, Leave Program:

<http://montgomerycollege.edu/verified/pnp>

Collective Bargaining Agreement between Montgomery College and AAUP:

<http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/ohr/aaup.html>

Collective Bargaining Agreement between Montgomery College and AFSCME:

<http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/ohr/afscme.html>

What if I don't have enough leave to cover my absence from work due to the influenza outbreak or pandemic, how can I afford to stay at home until I am completely well before returning to work?

Employees unable to report to work as a result of personal or family illness are expected to cover those absences in accordance with leave policies and procedures in place. It is very important that you do not return to work until your fever has subsided for at least 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications. If you do not have enough paid leave, accrued sick leave or accrued vacation leave to cover the period of time you are absent because of your own illness related to H1N1 or seasonal influenza, eligible employees, upon recommendation of the supervisor, may borrow against future leave earnings in the form of Advanced Sick Leave, according to leave policies, procedures, and bargaining agreements in place.

While Advanced Sick Leave will not be granted to employees to care for a family member's illness, employees may be entitled to leave without pay to care for a qualifying family member, subject to the provisions of the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). In addition, leave without pay for one through five consecutive working days may be granted to eligible employees by his/her supervisor to cover the period of time absent because of illness related to H1N1 or seasonal influenza. For further information on leave programs, please see the following links accordingly:

College Policy and Procedure 35003/35003CP, Leave Program:

<http://montgomerycollege.edu/verified/pnp>

Collective Bargaining Agreement between Montgomery College and AAUP:

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When should I return to work?

Based on CDC recommendations, do not return to work until you have been without a fever for more than 24 hours, without the assistance of anti-fever medication. [A fever is defined as a temperature of 100° F (37.8° C) or higher or any sign of a fever such as chills, a warm feel to the touch, a flushed appearance or sweating.] For more information about the H1N1 virus and its symptoms, visit the CDC Web site at: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu, www.flu.gov or call 800-CDC-INFO.

Will my illness be kept confidential?

As is the case with other illnesses, the Office of Human Resources will not notify individual work groups when co-workers become ill with presumed H1N1 or seasonal influenza.

What if I'm not sick, but I need to stay at home to care for my child or spouse who has the flu?

All employees, particularly "Essential Employees," are advised to develop contingency plans to meet their work obligations should family members become sick and need to be cared for. Employees who are designated as "Essential" must inform their supervisor, in advance, of personal situations that could impact their ability to perform their essential functions. Supervisors are asked to be flexible in responding to situations to help employees balance family and work obligations.

What if I am not ill nor are my children, but their school district or day care is closed and I have no one to watch them. What should I do?

All employees, particularly "Essential Employees," are advised to develop contingency plans to meet their work obligations should family members become sick and need to be cared for. Employees who are designated as "Essential" must inform their supervisor, in advance, of personal situations that could impact their ability to perform their essential functions. Supervisors are asked to be flexible in responding to situations to help employees balance family and work obligations.

If there are large numbers of employees who are unable to come to work because of the influenza outbreak, can I be asked to work overtime hours or shifts that I normally do not work?

In the event of a serious outbreak, we all may be needed to work differently to ensure the institution continues to function and our students are supported. You may be asked to work more hours or different hours than normal, especially if your position is considered an essential service position, the institution is short-staffed as a result of the influenza outbreak, or new services are required to respond to the influenza outbreak. However, the College will honor all applicable state and federal laws as they relate to wages and hours.

When I return to work, will I be required to present a medical certificate?

If you were absent from work with flu like symptoms, you will not be required to present a medical certificate.

If I am out from work because I have to care for my child or spouse, but I am not sick and my circumstances permit me to work, can I work from home?

The College recognizes that flexible work hours during a flu pandemic may help prevent the spread of flu at the workplace and allow employees to continue to work or function while limiting contact with others. If flexible work schedules become necessary for continuity of business operations, the College will make an effort to implement changes accordingly. If the need warrants, you may be able to work from home, with the approval of your supervisor. Check with your supervisor to determine if your job duties are such that your work could be done from home in the short-term.

If my child's school (day care) is closed due to an incident of H1N1 or seasonal influenza, and my child is not sick, can I bring him/her to work with me (if I have no other child care arrangements)?

Bringing a child to work is not recommended or advisable-and in many work areas it is prohibited. For further information, please see College Procedure 75005CP, Children on College Premises, via the following link. <http://montgomerycollege.edu/verified/npn>.

During this H1N1 influenza outbreak and possible pandemic, under what circumstances could my supervisor cancel vacation leave requests that have already been approved?

Should the situation become urgent enough to require heightened measures, your supervisor may cancel any pre-approved paid time off leave requests, especially in circumstances where there are serious staff shortages as a result of illness. Your time off also could be cancelled if your job is considered an essential service position.

How can I stay informed about H1N1 Influenza or a seasonal flu pandemic?

The Montgomery College Emergency Web site includes information on emergency procedures including the H1N1 Education and Prevention Program, H1N1 Updates, Montgomery College ALERT, and links to other resources. Please visit the MC Emergency Web site at: <http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/emergency>. In addition, H1N1 Influenza Updates may be accessed via Inside MC Online at: <http://insidemc.montgomerycollege.edu>.

Should a significant influenza outbreak strike, what assistance will be available to help me cope with its impact emotionally?

The College provides resources to help employees and eligible dependents cope with stressful life events through its Faculty and Staff Assistance Program (FSAP), managed by First Advantage. Further information about the Faculty Staff Assistance Program is available via the OHR Web site at: <http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/ohr/fsap.html>. You may also contact First Advantage directly via the following link: <http://www.fadv.com/eapsap>.

October 15, 2009

As is always the case, any employee who abuses leave by falsifying reasons for an absence may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination. For further information about the College's leave program, please see Policy and Procedure 35003/35003CP, Leave Program, via the following link: <http://montgomerycollege.edu/verified/pnp>.

The Office of Human Resources encourages Faculty and Staff to talk to their personal healthcare provider for specific questions about their own health. College employees should also talk to their supervisor about any workplace concerns related to H1N1 flu.

All future updates to this publication will be made accessible via the OHR Web site and MC Emergency Web site.