

## H1N1 “Swine” Flu Precautions

This summer we began seeing a few students with H1N1 flu. As the fall semester begins and more students are on campus, we are expecting that at some point the incidence of this new flu virus at MTSU will increase. While we can not stop this virus from coming to MTSU, we will do our best to minimize its impact.

Thankfully, at this time, H1N1 flu is behaving like typical seasonal flu and is responding in a predictable and consistent manner. Students have fever, muscle aches, headache, usually cough, often sore throat, and sometimes nausea and vomiting. Students who have H1N1 influenza typically have a fever for 2-4 days and are considered contagious for 24 hours after resolution of fever. This means the typical college student will need to miss 3-5 days of class, work, and extra-curricular activities.

In light of the small risk of more severe disease with any influenza virus, including H1N1 influenza, we also want to make sure students are aware of the warning signs with influenza that necessitate urgent medical attention:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worsening cough

MTSU advises students to take the precautions outlined below to help themselves and others stay healthy. The following advice comes from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash immediately after use.

Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.

Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

If you get sick with influenza, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

If you have any flu like symptoms please make an appointment online [www.mtsu.edu/healthservices](http://www.mtsu.edu/healthservices) or call 898-2988. For additional information on H1N1 flu see the health services link and [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) and [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov)

## For MTSU Students, Parents, and Faculty

### Frequently Asked Questions

**Do you test ill students for the H1N1 flu?** We do a standard rapid office screen for influenza A and B for each student with flu like symptoms. If a student has H1N1 flu our office rapid screen hopefully will show positive. However, all office tests for influenza are, unfortunately, not perfect and in the office setting may miss 30% or more students with influenza. With such testing limits, students with *suspected* H1N1 influenza and negative test results are still treated as if they have *confirmed* H1N1 influenza and offered antiviral medication (see question on antivirals) and a note for class and work too.

In addition to standard office testing we have become a Sentinel Provider for the US Surveillance Network and are allowed to send a designated amount of samples to their lab for H1N1 PCR testing (and possible cultures for antiviral sensitivities) as part of that program. However, these results are not immediately available and are more meant to aid the CDC and health departments in surveying the current influenza situation and in monitoring for changes in the H1N1 virus. This means, unfortunately, that they are not back soon enough to guide our recommendations to patients. Therefore any flu like symptoms should be considered influenza to be safe.

**What do students do about class while they are ill?** The CDC recommends that students stay out of class (and work) until they have no fever for 24 hours. So far the typical patient has a fever for 2-4 days, which would equate to missing 3-5 days of school and work. MTSU has traditionally not given notes for class, and has had the student discuss and negotiate with the professor about what to do if ill. However, with the special circumstances this year with H1N1 influenza, MTSU Student Health will give a note to the student that verifies they have an illness consistent with H1N1 influenza. It would still be prudent for students to keep in contact with professors by email or phone regarding their situation.

CDC recommendations have been quite fluid in response to H1N1 influenza as the characterization and understanding of this specific influenza virus has improved. As the virus has spread across the globe, its behavior has thankfully been quite consistent and predictable, and its illness pattern so similar to seasonal influenza that recommendations have changed to reflect what is now known. Earlier this summer recommendations were for students to stay out of class or work for 7 days or until symptom free for 24 hours, whichever was longer (a significant change from current recommendations which are much less disruptive to keeping up with class work and tests). We will remain vigilant to not let our guard down as to changes with this new strain of influenza, and realize that all students are not the same – any student at any time can have significant illness that bears close watch.

**Should I go home to my family if I have H1N1 influenza?** If a student is following a typical course of the flu and is able to take care of his/her basic needs while ill, it is certainly fine to stay in the dorm or apartment here at MTSU. The H1N1 flu is behaving so similarly to the seasonal flu that we fight on campus every year and most students do fine remaining at MTSU during seasonal flu illness. If a student is having a tough time meeting their basic needs while ill with the flu and has family who wish to give the TLC of home then it is certainly fine to obtain care at home when flu symptoms are at their peak. However, please use sound judgment in this regard – if going home is going to put a relative with serious

medical problem such as emphysema at risk of catching the flu, it is not prudent to expose this relative to the risk of H1N1 influenza.

**My roommate has the flu. I don't want to risk exposure. Can I be put in a separate room?**

Unfortunately in a pandemic spread of the virus is possible on campus in many locations. There is no additional housing on campus to separate sick and non-sick students, but we can offer well students a preventive dosing schedule of antiviral medications to take for 10 days to prevent catching the illness from their roommate.

**Should I take antiviral medication such as Tamiflu or Relenza for the flu?** With all the statements about antivirals in the above questions, it may seem a certainty that a person ill with the flu should take an antiviral for their illness, or should take an antiviral to prevent flu if exposed; but there does need to be some discussion about influenza medications. Antivirals do lower the severity of symptoms of the flu and reduce the duration of the influenza virus, and can be used to reduce the risk of contracting influenza if exposed. This improvement is seen both with H1N1 flu and typical seasonal flu.

However, if you will remember with one of the strains seen in last year's seasonal flu there was some press coverage of the development of resistance to the antiviral Tamiflu. Viruses can become resistant to antivirals, just as bacteria become resistant to antibiotics.

The new H1N1 influenza has been found to be universally resistant to the older antivirals, Amantadine and Flumadine, but at this time sensitive, in general, to the newer antivirals, Tamiflu and Relenza. (It should be mentioned that a few scattered cases of resistance to Tamiflu have been seen in different areas of the world already). Antiviral resistance is troubling and there is no perfect answer. We have a lot of students, faculty, and staff in close proximity, as with any school setting, and we are offering the medication at this time with the perspective that we may be able to contain spread somewhat until the H1N1 vaccine is out, but please realize antiviral medication is not necessary to recover from the flu. Also, brand name antivirals such as Tamiflu are quite costly (especially if uninsured and paying the total price). The CDC's comments on antivirals even state: *Clinical judgment is an important factor in treatment decisions. Persons with suspected novel H1N1 influenza who present with an uncomplicated febrile illness typically do not require treatment unless they are at higher risk for influenza complications, and in areas with limited antiviral medication availability, local public health authorities might provide additional guidance about prioritizing treatment within groups at higher risk for infection.* At this time we are offering medication to all students, but that may have to change as circumstances change. (Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/recommendations.htm>)

**How does the H1N1 virus spread?** Spread of this H1N1 virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes individuals may become infected by touching their mouth or nose after touching an object harboring the influenza virus. (Source: [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov))

**What are the best ways to protect myself from getting the H1N1 virus?** MTSU Health Services advises students, their parents, and our faculty and staff to take the precautions outlined below to help themselves and others stay healthy. The following advice comes from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash immediately after use.

Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.

Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

If you get sick with influenza, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

**What is the best technique for washing hands to avoid getting the flu?** Washing your hands will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. We recommend that when you wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using gel, rub your hands until the gel is dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in it kills the germs on your hands.

(Source: [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov))

## **On-campus living and your health**

The information found below is offered to assist and educate members of our community about potential health concerns that exist in any community living environment (residence hall, on- or off-campus apartment, and other shared living environments). Use the provided links to gather more information about the specific topic.

- **MRSA: Keeping Yourself & Your Community Safe**

There has been a lot of press lately about serious infections caused by a common skin bacteria, Staph aureus that is resistant to common antibiotics.

Staphylococcus aureus is a type of bacteria that lives in the nose and on the skin and it may cause skin infections. The infected area usually begins with a small bump that resembles a pimple or insect bite, which becomes red, swollen, painful and full of pus. Skin infections are the most common type of infection associated with this bacteria. Unfortunately, some Staph bacteria are resistant to antibiotics making it harder to treat. Methicillin-resistance means that the antibiotic methicillin and other related antibiotics do not kill these bacteria. These are called "MRSA" (Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus).

**To prevent the spread of MRSA skin infections, follow the suggested personal hygiene prevention steps listed below:**

- Wash your hands/forearms before/after touching the wound.
- Wash your hands frequently throughout the day.
- Use soap and warm water for 15-20 seconds.
- Dry your hands on a clean towel.
- Bathe regularly and do not share bath towels or wash cloths.
- Avoid sharing personal items (razors, soap, deodorant, clothing).
- Wear clean clothing.
- Avoid sharing drinks and utensils before they are cleaned.

**Additional recommendations on preventing the spread of MRSA**

**For your home or living quarters:**

- Keep your bedroom and bathroom clean.
- Keep surfaces clean using cleaners or household bleach.
- Bleach Recipe:(1:100 bleach-to-water solution or 1 T 1 qt water)
- Use hot water and hot air to wash and dry laundry and dishes.

A MRSA skin infection is treatable. If you are experiencing any of the symptoms described above, please contact Health Services to schedule an appointment at 898.2988. If you have been seen by a doctor and antibiotics were prescribed, it is extremely important that you take all of the antibiotic doses, even if the infection is getting better, unless your doctor has advised otherwise. If your infection is not getting better after a few days, contact your doctor or Health Services at 898.2988.

For more information about MRSA, please visit the Health Services website at <http://www.mtsu.edu/~mthealth/news.htm>

- **MMR Vaccine**

The state of Tennessee requires students entering college, universities, and technical institutes with enrollment greater than 200 students to provide proof of two (2) doses of Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccine on or after the first birthday or proof of immunity to measles.

In compliance with this law, and in an attempt to maintain a safe and healthy campus environment, Middle Tennessee State University requires that all entering students, born after 1956, furnish

documented proof of having immunity to measles or having been immunized with two doses of MMR vaccine on or after the first birthday unless contraindicated because of pregnancy, allergy to a vaccine component, or other valid medical reason(s).

The law states that immunizations are not required if they "conflict with individual's religious tenets and practices, affirmed under penalties of perjury." They are also not required if a qualified physician shall certify that administration of such immunization would be in any manner harmful to the child involved. (TCA Section 49-6-5001)

To learn more about MTSU's policy on the MMR vaccine, click on the link below:

<http://www.mtsu.edu/~mthealth/>

- **Meningitis**

Recently the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) strengthened its position on the Meningitis vaccine. The committee recommends routine vaccination of young adolescents with MCV4 at the pre-adolescent visit (11-12 year old). ACIP recommends that young adolescents see a healthcare provider at age 11-12 for a routine preventive visit, at which time appropriate immunizations and other preventive services should be provided.

College freshman who live in dormitories are at higher risk for meningococcal disease compared to other people of the same age. The risk for meningococcal disease among non-freshmen college students is similar to that for the general population of similar age (18-24 years). However, the vaccines are safe and immunogenic, and therefore can be provided to non-freshmen college students who want to reduce their risk for meningococcal disease.

The vaccine is highly effective. However, it does not protect people against meningococcal disease caused by "type B" bacteria, which is responsible for one-third of meningococcal cases. To learn more, click on the link below:

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/meningococcal\\_g.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/meningococcal_g.htm)

- **General Health issues**

Student Health Services provides MTSU students with a wide variety of services including health education, outpatient services, a treatment and allergy clinic, and women's health. A prepaid student health fee covers the cost of basic office visits. There may be additional charges for other professional services such as laboratory tests, medications, injections, suturing, and EKGs. To learn more about the services provided by Student Health Services, click on the link below:

<http://www.mtsu.edu/~mthealth/index.htm>

- **Mental Health issues**

Counseling Services offers personal counseling, assisting students in their emotional, intellectual and social growth. Counseling Services sees the whole of the university as an educational opportunity, and although their work primarily involves non-classroom activities, they are equally concerned with students' academic achievement. They provide students with assistance in making life decisions. Services are provided in a non-judgmental and confidential environment. To learn more about the services provided by Counseling Services, click on the link below:

<http://www.mtsu.edu/%7Ecountest/>

- **Health and Wellness**

Campus Recreation offers a 140,000-square-foot facility with six basketball / volleyball courts, six racquetball courts, a three-lane indoor track, a 4,000-square-foot aerobics room, over 8,000 square feet of free weights, cardiovascular machines, an indoor swimming pool, 33 meters by 25 yards with water slide and diving board, equipment checkout, locker rooms, a rock climbing wall, a sundeck adjacent to four sand volleyball courts, outdoor pool, 75 feet by 25 feet with a depth of 0 to five feet, indoor soccer/inline hockey arena, ropes challenge course, and massage therapy room. To learn more about the services provided by Campus Recreation, click on the link below:

<http://www.mtsu.edu/%7Ecamprec/>