

Public Health Alert-H1N1 Virus Information

Updated 5:00pm 6/11/09

Today the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that the H1N1 virus has reached a pandemic level. This announcement is not a report of the severity of the H1N1 virus but more a report on how it has spread geographically. Specifically, the number of cases of the virus and its presence on all continents except Antarctica now fits the WHO definition of a pandemic disease. In light of the ease of human to human transmission this announcement is neither unexpected nor surprising. For more information about what the pandemic level means visit the WHO website.

In regard to the severity of the disease, WHO has stated that the “pandemic announcement would not mean the situation was worsening, since no mutations have been detected in the virus to show its getting more deadly”. From our own experience in Boston and the rest of the country, the H1N1 virus remains a fairly mild form of influenza with typical symptoms consisting of three to five days of fever, body aches, sore throat and cough. Thankfully, the number of serious or fatal cases so far has been less than a typical seasonal flu and all of these cases have been in patients with significant underlying illness

H1N1 virus is spread from human to human the same way the seasonal flu spreads. When an infected person sneezes or coughs droplets travel in the air. Someone can become infected by these droplets if they touch something the virus is on and then touch their mouth or nose. H1N1 is not spread through food, water, or recreational water areas (e.g. pools, spas).

In spite of the fact the H1N1 virus has so far been mild it is in all our best interests to try to limit its spread and thus reduce the suffering and lost productivity associated with infection. For these reasons and to protect those among us at risk due to underlying disease, it is important that all of us at Northeastern continue to practice steps to protect ourselves and stay healthy.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your inner elbow when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water especially after sneezing and coughing. You can also use alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Do not go to work or school if sick. It is recommended that you stay at home for 7 days after you first get sick or for 24 hours after your symptoms have gone away, whichever is longer. Try to limit contact with others to keep from getting them sick.

UHCS providers are monitoring all students who come into the health center with flu-like illness symptoms per guidelines set by the Boston Public Health Commission and Massachusetts Department of Public Health. We will keep our campus community updated on the latest developments in the H1N1 pandemic.