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H1N1 Flu Update - An Unusual Flu Season

By Susan Quinn, Director, Student Health Services

This year we are faced with an unusual flu season, with two separate influenzas expected in our community. The H1N1 influenza, or swine flu, has been atypically present in Sonoma County all summer, and has received needed attention as we move through the fall semester. Until the vaccine is available, SRJC is doing what it can to minimize the flu's impact as much as possible by promoting prevention information that encourages individuals who become ill to isolate themselves at home immediately. By doing so, we hope to avoid large, disruptive outbreaks of the flu, due to high absenteeism. While those who have been identified as the most vulnerable are pregnant women and those with asthma, diabetes or heart conditions, it's important to remember that most people will recover from the H1N1 flu without complications.

SEASONAL FLU VACCINES

The seasonal flu typically arrives in our community in November. A vaccine for this flu is widely available in Sonoma County. The CDC recommends that everyone get vaccinated now to help reduce the impact in our community when it arrives. Local pharmacies, doctor's offices, Kaiser, and the Public Health Department now offer flu shots at various times and prices; some insurance plans cover the cost. SRJC now has vaccines available for the seasonal flu in Student Health Services. Flu shots will be available to students and employees starting September 21. Call to make an appointment at 527-4445 at the Santa Rosa Campus and 778-3919 at Petaluma. The cost for faculty and staff is \$20, and payment options include cash or pre-paid in the Accounting Offices (bring receipt). For students, the cost is \$10. Cash, pre-paid in the Accounting Offices, (bring receipt), or a Student Charge can be made on site.

PREVENTING INFLUENZA

Information about the flu can be quickly accessed on the SRJC home page link "Flu Information Center" at <http://www.santarosa.edu/flu-information-center>. The site is regularly updated with the most current information. Last week the Flu Task Force added a video about H1N1 prevention to the site that was produced by Foothill College: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v10f1bzlhcg>. A popular, humorous video is also available under the link "Flu Information Resources" that demonstrates proper coughing and sneezing etiquette. For laughter therapy, access: <http://www.coughsafe.com/media.html>.

Last week the Flu Task Force placed flu prevention posters in English and Spanish in classrooms and offices collegewide, as well as flu prevention decals that are being placed in restrooms to help stop the spread of germs.



IF YOU BECOME SICK WITH FLU

Flu symptoms include a fever over 100 degrees F., and a cough, particularly a "new" one. The flu typically comes on suddenly, over the course of a few hours with muscle and joint aches, headache, runny nose, sore throat, sneezing, and sometimes nausea and vomiting are also flu symptoms.

If you experience these symptoms, go home to isolate yourself immediately, and follow these self-care instructions at http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance_homecare_directions.htm

- Notify your instructors and/or work supervisors that you will need to stay home for a period of time, based on the following guidelines:
- Stay at home for at least 24 hours after a fever is gone without the use of fever reducing medicine.
- If you attend classes or work in a health-care setting, you should stay at home for 7 days after the onset of flu symptoms or until symptoms subside, whichever is longer.
- If you are experiencing severe illness, or are in a high-risk category, contact your health-care provider immediately by phone. Flu medicines may be prescribed or you may be scheduled for a visit to be evaluated. Testing for the flu is being done in only rare situations.
- If students are ill, they may call Student Health Services at 527-4445 in Santa Rosa or 778-3919 Petaluma. Nurses will be available for phone consultations during office hours.

EXPOSED TO FLU, BUT NOT SICK

People exposed to the H1N1 virus who are not sick, do not have to self isolate and may attend classes and work. Parents of young children who are sick may need to care for them at home. Medical clearance slips from health-care providers to return to normal activities are not being recommended by the CDC.

Thank you for educating yourself as a key part of flu prevention!