

September 2009

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I'm sure this is a busy time for you, with your SUNY student just off to college. We're busy settling them in to our campus and their new routine as well. Part of that process is notifying them of various campus policies and procedures. Of particular interest this year are the plans we've made with regard to influenza, a topic on which I also want to make sure you are up-to-date.

SUNY Potsdam has been taking a proactive approach to the H1N1 pandemic. The Emergency Response Resource Group, comprised of administrators who have the ability to influence the campus' actions during a crisis, has been meeting routinely since the H1N1 flu outbreak began. We will continue to meet throughout the academic year to implement and revise our Pandemic Flu Plan in response to this unique virus.

While this is a novel virus to which most of us have no immunity, the worldwide experience thus far shows that the illness it causes is similar to the regular seasonal flu, with fever, chills, headache, body aches, sore throat, cough, and sometimes nausea/vomiting, usually lasting from 3 – 5 days. Your student has already received a letter from me outlining steps they can take to try to prevent themselves from becoming infected. To that end, please encourage them to get the H1N1 vaccine when the vaccine clinics are run on campus. The letter also gives advice about what they should do if they become ill. One of the mainstays of treatment is to have them isolate themselves from other students on campus.

The Centers for Disease Control recommends a period of isolation until there is no fever for 24 hours without the use of anti-fever medications. Alternatively, students can isolate themselves for 7 days from the onset of symptoms. Due to physical constraints, this campus does not have the ability to place ill students, or their well roommates, into alternative housing until the contagious period is over.

Therefore my first recommendation for your student, if they become ill with influenza, is to ask you come and get them and take them home. This will help reduce the exposure of their roommates and suitemates to the virus with the added benefit that they will receive much closer monitoring of their condition under your direct care. Besides, a week is a long time to spend in one room.

If it is not possible for your child to go home, SUNY Potsdam has mechanisms in place to allow your student's "flu buddy" pick up their meals and other essentials and bring them to their room. Periodic follow-up with Student Health Services is available to monitor them for complications, Monday through Friday, during normal office hours. Their roommates and suitemates will also be asked to make an appointment at Student Health Services to assess how we can best reduce their risk for contracting influenza.

I realize that having to drop everything to come and pick up your ill child is a heavy burden on you. However, I hope you understand that we are trying to balance what is best for your child with the health and safety of the other students on campus. Making contingency plans now, before the issue arises, should also help to make this process easier. By working together we will be able to support your student's well being and academic success.

Richard E. Moose, MD
Director – Student Health Services