



Cornell's HR Guidance During H1N1 Outbreak

Frequently Asked Questions

This document will be updated as additional questions come to our attention. Please revisit it regularly.

Nothing contained in this document is intended to supersede Cornell policy or collective bargaining agreements.

Important Resources for Employees

Where can I find the latest information about the new H1N1 flu, the situation at Cornell, and available resources?

General information about the flu at Cornell: www.cornell.edu/flu.

Up-to-date health information, prevention tips, treatment and self-care recommendations, and posters to print and post: www.gannett.cornell.edu.

Vaccine information and clinic schedule: www.gannett.cornell.edu.

Questions about the flu at Cornell: call the Cornell Flu Line at 607.255.0101 or e-mail flu-info@cornell.edu.

General questions about flu: call New York State Department of Health Flu Hotline: 800.808.1987.

Confidential counseling and consultation: call the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program at 800.327.2255 (select option #1).

Personal health questions: please call your primary care provider.

Time Off and Pay When the Campus Remains Open

What should I do if I develop influenza symptoms?

If you become ill with flu-like symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, runny nose, or vomiting or diarrhea, contact your primary care provider, who will advise you on options for care.

If you are ill:

- Notify your supervisor that you are ill and will not be able to work.

- Stay home until at least 24 hours after you are free of fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- Avoid contact with other people and avoid social gatherings as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others. Wear a facemask if keeping a distance of 6 feet is not possible.
- When coughing or sneezing, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue and then throw the tissue away. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve or elbow, not your hands.

When can I return to work if I have had H1N1?

Flu viruses can be transmitted before, during, and after an infected person has symptoms; however, a person is most contagious during a fever. You should stay home until at least 24 hours after you are free of fever, or signs of a fever without the use of fever-reducing medications. Though the lingering of some symptoms (e.g. cough) may not be reason to remain at home, it is important to maintain flu prevention measures as it is still possible to transmit the virus for up to 7 days after you get sick.

If an employee is sent home, or stays home from work due to illness, how will he/she be paid?

The following options are available although not all options will be available in all situations depending upon the nature of the job responsibilities and the extent of the illness:

- Use accrued leave; for example, Vacation or Sick Leave.
- Use accrued compensatory time.
- Work from home with supervisory approval
- Make up the work on an hour-for-hour basis during the same pay period with supervisory approval.

I have an employee with little or no sick leave accrued and several others with large accruals. Can they donate sick leave to the person with no accruals if that person becomes ill and cannot come to work?

No, the policy on donation of leave does not apply in situations of minor illness, or where the absence is of short duration.

Do I have to use my own accrued leave if my supervisor sends me home even though I think I'm well enough to work?

Yes, you must use your own accrued leave or request an absence without pay. Depending upon the nature of your illness and your job responsibilities, you may be able to make up the work in the same pay period, or work from home with supervisory approval.

I don't have enough leave to cover my absence from work due to H1N1. How can I afford to stay home until I am completely well before returning to work?

To minimize the potential exposure to others, it is very important that you do not return to work until at least 24 hours after you are free of fever, or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.

The following options are available, although not all options will be available in all situations, depending upon the nature of the job responsibilities and the extent of the illness.

- Work from home with supervisory approval.
- Make up the work on an hour-for-hour basis during the same pay period with supervisory approval.
- Request a leave without pay for up to 7 days with supervisory approval. If a doctor certifies that you are unable to work, short term disability benefits may be available after a 7 calendar day waiting period, to cover part of your lost wages.

I have an employee who is ill and has come into work. I'm concerned about the potential for exposure to other people. Can I send this employee home?

Yes. Of greatest concern is an employee with a fever greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit coupled with coughing or sneezing; as a person is most contagious during a fever. This employee should definitely be sent home. Other flu-like symptoms may also be of concern; the decision to send an employee home who is exhibiting these symptoms is to be made on a case-by-case basis. In addition, supervisors should advise employees of the basic preventative measures (practice good hygiene, including thorough and frequent hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, and avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth with your hands). Printable posters and fact sheets are available for posting in the work area on the Gannett Health Services web site: www.gannett.cornell.edu/campushealth/Influenza/campaign.html.

May I choose to go home if I don't want to be exposed to a sick coworker who isn't sent home?

Yes, with supervisory approval you may leave work; however, you must use your own accrued leave or request a leave without pay. With your supervisor's approval, making up the work in the same pay period, working a different schedule, or working from home may be options available to you.

I'm not sick, but I don't want to come to work for fear of becoming ill. Is my supervisor required to approve my request for time off?

You may, with supervisory approval, request Vacation or Personal Leave; however, your supervisor may elect not to grant your request for time off, especially if your department is short staffed. It is important to educate yourself about the H1N1 virus and its transmission. Visit the web sites listed at the top of this FAQ document. If you are pregnant, over 65, or have underlying health conditions that may increase your risk of developing complications related to the flu (such as asthma, diabetes, immune suppression, or heart, lung, kidney, or liver disease), consult with your health care provider to discuss your concerns and appropriate strategies to support your health.

During the H1N1 flu outbreak can my supervisor cancel my leave request that has already been approved?

Yes, your supervisor has the authority to cancel any pre-approved leave request, especially in circumstances where there are serious staffing shortages as a result of illness.

My child's school (day care) is closed due to circulation of H1N1 influenza, and my child is not sick. I have no other child care arrangements. Can I bring him to work with me?

Bringing a child to work is not recommended or advisable—and in many work areas it is prohibited. Decisions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the dean or department head.

My child's school (day care) is closed due to circulation of H1N1 influenza, and my child is not sick. I have no other child care arrangements and must stay home with him. How will I be paid?

Promptly notify your supervisor of the reason for your absence and your anticipated return to work date. In this situation, the following options are available, although not all options will be available in all situations, depending upon the nature of your job responsibilities:

- Use accrued vacation, personal, or family health care leave.
- Use accrued compensatory time.
- Work from home with supervisory approval.
- Make up the work on an hour-for-hour basis during the same pay period.
- Request a leave without pay with supervisory approval.

More information on faculty and staff leave policies can be found at:
www.ohr.cornell.edu/policies/formsEmployee/univPolicy/FamHlthParlIndex.html

Does FMLA apply if my spouse or child gets sick with H1N1 influenza, and I must stay home to care for him/her?

In most cases yes, provided the employee and family member meet the eligibility requirements. FMLA requires the university to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid job protected leave to an eligible employee to care for the employee's spouse, son or daughter, or parent who has a serious health condition; or for a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the employee's job. An employee is entitled to FMLA if he or she has worked for the University for at least 12 cumulative months and has been paid for at least a 1,000 hours in the previous 12 months. FMLA information and resources are available at: www.ohr.cornell.edu/benefits/index.html.

If I have been exposed to someone with Flu-Like symptoms and/or confirmed or suspected H1N1. Should I come to work?

It is important to educate yourself about the H1N1 virus and its transmission. Visit the web sites listed at the top of this FAQ document. If you are pregnant, over 65, or have underlying health conditions that may increase your risk of developing complications related to the flu (such as asthma, diabetes, immune suppression, or heart, lung, kidney, or liver disease), consult with your health care provider to discuss your concerns and appropriate strategies to support your health. All employees are able to come to work normally without restrictions unless they have flu-like symptoms.

Work Schedules/Alternative Worksites

Does my supervisor have to approve my request to telecommute if there is widespread illness?

Supervisory approval is necessary to work from home, but not all requests to telecommute can be approved. Not every position is suitable for telecommuting, due to specific job duties that cannot be performed at home or operating requirements of the unit.

Can my supervisor schedule me to work hours or shifts that I normally do not work?

Yes, you may be asked to work more hours or different hours than normal, especially if the university is short staffed as a result of the influenza outbreak. The university will attempt to provide advance notice if possible.

If a large number of employees are unable to come to work because of illness from the flu, are there a maximum number of overtime hours my supervisor can require me to work?

In the event illness becomes more severe or widespread, everyone may need to work differently to ensure the university continues to function. You may be asked to work more hours or different hours than normal, especially if the university is short staffed. Supervisors will make every effort to limit the number of overtime hours and to permit employees to take rest periods, and may use their discretion in scheduling additional breaks for employees working additional hours.

If I am required to work additional hours or a different shift as a result of the influenza how will I be paid?

Any non-exempt employee required to work must be paid. They should input their hours into COLTS or KRONOS as usual, even if the hours are on a different shift than they usually work and even if it results in time worked over 40 hours in the particular work week, incurring overtime costs. Exempt staff do not keep track of hours so they would receive their usual paycheck.

Employee Services

What assistance is available to help me cope with the emotional impact of this stressful situation?

Cornell provides resources to help benefits-eligible employees and their dependents cope with these types of life events through its Faculty/Staff Assistance Program (FSAP). The FSAP provides confidential, short-term counseling at no cost to the employee. Employees: Call 1-800-327-2255 (select option #1). 24 hour per day, 7 day per week service available. Email: fsap@cornell.edu

Health Insurance

Will my health care plan cover medical expenses associated with treatment for influenza?

Yes, you will have the same coverage that is currently available for any emergency or non-emergency illness. For additional coverage details visit www.ohr.cornell.edu/benefits.

If I unable to get a flu shot at one of the free Cornell flu shot clinics will my Cornell health plan pay for it if I go to my primary care physician?

In most instances Yes, but coverage for the seasonal flu and H1N1 vaccine is dependent upon which health plan you are covered by. You can obtain current information about your coverage by calling the 1-800 number on the back of your insurance card. A chart that describes coverage by plan can also be found at www.ohr.cornell.edu/fluCoverage.pdf.

Event Planning

National, state, and local health officials tell us there is no reason at present to change our plans for upcoming events and programs. However, individuals with underlying conditions who are at high risk for complications of influenza may want to consider avoiding large gatherings.

We encourage everyone involved in hosting programs and events to be informed of the facts about H1N1 flu, aware of Cornell's efforts to protect the health and safety of the community, and committed to prevention measures:

- Post signs (available to print from the Gannett web site) to remind people of common sense measures to protect their own health and that of others.
- Explicitly discourage persons from attending the event if they do not feel well.
- Provide hand sanitizing gels/wipes, tissues, and trash receptacles.
- Think through ways to provide food and drinks that make it easier for individuals to keep germs to themselves.

Up-to-date recommendations regarding program and event planning at Cornell are available at: www.gannett.cornell.edu/downloads/campusInitiatives/Influenza/H1N1CornellEventsProgUpdate.pdf.

General Questions about H1N1 influenza

What are the symptoms of the new H1N1 flu?

The symptoms of H1N1 (swine) flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular seasonal flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with H1N1 flu.

Are flu evaluations available on campus for faculty and staff?

No. If you are experiencing flu-like symptoms, please contact your primary care provider for evaluation. If you do not have a primary care provider, the Cayuga Medical Center Convenient Care Center and the Guthrie Medical Group are good resources right here in Ithaca. Gannett Health Services is the primary care provider for Cornell's 20,000 students and does not provide primary care services for staff and faculty.

How severe is illness associated with 2009 H1N1 flu virus?

Illness with the new H1N1 virus has ranged from mild to severe. Most people who have been sick have recovered fully without needing medical treatment.

However, hospitalizations and deaths from infection with this virus have occurred. In this, it is also similar to seasonal flu, which is responsible for approximately 200,000 hospitalizations in the U.S. each year and 36,000 deaths. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that, from April 2009 through August 2009, there have been 9079 hospitalizations and 593 deaths associated with H1N1 influenza.

Who is at higher risk of serious complications?

In seasonal flu, certain people are at "high risk" of serious complications. This includes people 65 years and older, children younger than five years old, pregnant women, and people of any age with certain chronic medical conditions. About 70 percent of people who have been hospitalized with this 2009 H1N1 virus have had one or more medical conditions previously recognized as placing people at "high risk" of serious seasonal flu-related complications. This includes pregnancy, asthma, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, and immune suppression.

Does anyone have immunity to H1N1 influenza?

One thing that appears to be different from seasonal influenza is that adults older than 64 years do not yet appear to be at increased risk of 2009 H1N1-related complications thus far. CDC laboratory studies have shown that no children and very few adults younger than 60 years old have existing antibody to 2009 H1N1 flu virus. However, about one-third of adults older than 60 may have antibodies against this virus. It is unknown how much, if any, protection may be afforded against 2009 H1N1 flu by any existing antibody. One group is unlikely to get 2009 H1N1 influenza: those who have already had it this year.

Will Gannett provide flu campus clinics this year for seasonal and H1N1 vaccines?

Gannett will be holding seasonal flu clinics beginning in late September and going through early November. The seasonal flu vaccine is offered to employees at no charge as a benefit of employment. It is also free to all registered students. H1N1 vaccine is not yet available. The New York State Department of Health will oversee the approach and priorities for distribution. Up-to-date information about the H1N1 vaccine, as well as vaccine clinic schedules will be posted on the Gannett web site.

How is the H1N1 virus transmitted?

Seasonal and H1N1 flu are spread from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. These droplets can move through the air about 3 feet before they fall to the surface (of a desk, table, sink, keyboard, etc.) The flu spreads when a person comes into contact with the respiratory droplets of an infected person:

- directly, including by sharing eating or drinking utensils, kissing, etc. (This is why keeping a distance of about 6 feet from a sick person is important.)
- indirectly, by touching a surface or object that has flu viruses on it and then touching one's own mouth, nose, or eyes. (This is why frequent hand washing and cleaning of shared surfaces is important.)

What preventative measures should I encourage employees to take?

Awareness, thoughtfulness, and communication are the key ingredients to reducing the risk of catching *and* sharing the flu (and other illnesses). Encourage group conversations now about ways to reduce the risk in their particular work space, posters to display to make others aware of your concerns, expectations of each other regarding staying home when sick. Make sure everyone knows the common public health advice to avoid the flu:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- If tissues aren't available, cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water, especially after you cough, sneeze, or touch shared surfaces. If soap and water aren't available alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective. (A concentration of 60% alcohol or higher is recommended.)
- Plan ahead to ensure that enough alcohol-based hand sanitizers are available for situations where hand-washing facilities may not be available. Sanitizers that work without alcohol are available, if those are needed please contact EHS.
- Regularly clean all areas and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact and also immediately when visibly soiled. This may help, but should not substitute for hand washing.
- Do not share cups, eating utensils, smoking paraphernalia, lip balm, etc.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people. Keep a distance of about 6 feet if possible.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Get vaccinated
- Strengthen your immune system: eat a balanced diet; exercise on a regular basis; get plenty of rest.

I have a staff member who has asked to wear a facemask when meeting with students, staff, and customers. How do I respond?

At this time wearing a facemask is not advised for healthy persons. Public health officials advise that anyone who is sick with flu-like illness should wear a surgical mask when close contact (within 6 feet) with others cannot be avoided. Facemasks may help to reduce the risk of transmitting the H1N1 virus from a sick person to others, especially when used along with other preventative measures.

I meet with students, staff, and customers as part of my job responsibilities. What should I do if I encounter someone who is obviously sick?

As with other forms of the flu or contagious illnesses such as colds, maintaining a reasonable distance from the sick person is a starting point. Do not shake hands or make other physical contact. After the person has left use a disinfectant wipe to clean those areas of your work station that the person has touched. There may

be situations in which the meeting or encounter can be re-scheduled to a time when the person is feeling better, or the business can be conducted by phone or e-mail. Do not hesitate to offer this suggestion if it is appropriate. If you encounter sick students, you could encourage them to consult by phone with Gannett (255-5155).

The stress about H1N1 influenza seems to be getting to people. How can I help?

Humans by nature tend to be more afraid of what we don't know than what we do know, and when the threat is something people can't recognize or count or otherwise control, it can create a high level of anxiety...for some. Others meet the circumstance denial, humor, and resignation. The death of one of our own has shaken everyone.

Your help can make a difference:

- Meet fear with facts. Information is available on the Gannett web site and from the leading public health resource in the country: www.cdc.gov. These facts can help us put even tragedy in a realistic perspective.
- Stop rumors. If you hear something that doesn't sound right, or that you haven't heard from a reputable source, please check it out. Misinformation can only be remedied by good information, and there is plenty available. Much is known about this virus, the illnesses it causes, available self-care recommendations and medical interventions, as well as Cornell's policies and plans. If you don't have it, find out where you can get it. Cornell EHS is resource that can provide training and education.
- Help people regain control. Remind them that the most successful responses to any kind of community crisis is a neighbor-by-neighbor response. More than ever, being a caring community in this moment means taking good care of ourselves and each other: supporting each other in our efforts to stay healthy; planning together how we will manage if a member of our work group is sick or caring for a sick family member; reaching out to others with messages about essential flu prevention strategies.
- Making a plan with family, friends, or neighbors ways to support each other's recovery and period of isolation in the event of illness; putting in place plans for alternative care for children and elders; preparing a health kit; getting vaccinated; writing down phone numbers of health care providers; knowing what to watch for—all of these actions can help people feel more empowered to deal with this new version of a well-known illness.