

Message to Parents from the Vice President for Student Life

September 4, 2009

Dear Gonzaga Parents:

Gonzaga University recently experienced the first confirmed case of flu on campus this semester. A student in residence was diagnosed with Influenza A, which includes a variety of flu viruses including the seasonal flu and H1N1 flu. Specific testing is not being done for any suspected cases of H1N1 per the direction of public health authorities; instead, current medical guidance is to treat all flu cases as if they are H1N1 cases.

I am writing to you because of the important role you play in your student's life. You are a positive influence for keeping them healthy and I am asking that you communicate with your daughter or son about seasonal flu and H1N1. Our primary goal is to promote awareness of the current situation of how to stay healthy and avoid spreading the virus. I recently sent all students an email message about seasonal flu and H1N1. That information appears below and can guide you in discussing the situation.

The H1N1 virus in general appears to be no more severe than seasonal flu, but because it is a "novel" virus and uncommon in our population most people do not have natural immunity against it. It's clear from other colleges and universities that the flu can spread fairly rapidly. The threat posed by a flu outbreak at this time is that it could impact a large number of people. Individuals with compromised immune systems as a result of other medical conditions appear to be the most at risk for contracting the flu and experiencing complications which can become serious. Individuals who are generally in good health recover, often without seeking medical attention.

Gonzaga is a community in which close contact occurs very often – in the residence halls, classes, public spaces and activities. Under these conditions transmission of the flu virus, which occurs when droplets are expelled through a cough or sneeze, can be intensified unless everyone takes common sense precautions. These include covering coughs or sneezes with a tissue and then disposing of the tissue right away, washing hands frequently with soap and water or using a hand sanitizer, and avoiding contact with others if one is experiencing flu-like symptoms. These symptoms may include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some individuals also experience diarrhea and vomiting. An individual may have been exposed to the virus, and may be contagious themselves, a day or more before symptoms appear and five or more days after. Avoiding contact with others or "self isolation" for the duration of the illness is the best way to stop the spread of the virus.

If your student experiences flu-like symptoms please encourage them to contact the University Health Center to speak with a nurse as soon as possible. Contact information and hours for the Health Center can be found here: <http://www.gonzaga.edu/Student-Life/Support-for-Students/Wellness/Health-Center/Office-Hours.asp>

If your daughter or son experiences severe flu symptoms when the Health Center is closed she or he should seek immediate medical attention at an urgent care facility or hospital emergency department. For situations which pose a threat to health or safety call 911 first, then contact the Campus Security

dispatch at 313-2222. The Security dispatcher can also arrange a cab ride at no charge to and from a medical facility if emergency medical response is not needed.

Treatment includes a strong recommendation to self-isolate until symptoms are gone and 24 hours after any fever is gone. Self-isolation can occur in a student's residence hall room or apartment/house, although students may be encouraged to recuperate at home with family if possible. In general self-isolation will last from four to seven days. The Health Center staff is available, both by phone and at the Health Center, to discuss specifics of self-isolation and treatment of the flu. It is important to observe the full period of self-isolation because even if an individual appears healthy or feels better, he or she can still be contagious.

The University is continuing to develop and revise its flu response plan as the situation changes. A team of administrators and staff have been appointed by the interim president to coordinate the University's overall response. In particular the Health Center, Housing, Dining Services and Security are prepared to address the needs of individual students and the campus community. Arrangements are available for well students of sick roommates to temporarily relocate during the self-isolation period. The Health Center continues to provide the seasonal flu vaccine (not specific to H1N1) for a \$5.00 fee on a walk-in basis. Plant Services is intensifying the usual cleaning process and supplies such as disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizer are widely available on campus. The Academic Vice President's office is working with all academic deans and departments on issues such as class absences and instruction alternatives. You can read separate messages sent to Gonzaga faculty, staff and parents on the Health Center's Seasonal Flu and H1N1 Update page: <http://www.gonzaga.edu/Healthcenter>

I want to emphasize that although the H1N1 flu situation is serious it need not cause panic or alarm. We all have responsibility for stopping the spread of the disease. The best way to keep yourself and others from becoming ill is to practice good hygiene at all times. If your student experiences flu-like symptoms have them call or visit the Health Center and self-isolate. Everyone at the University has deep concern for the health and welfare of all our students. Providing you with information so that you are comfortable is an important part of reassuring students and keeping them focused on a positive college experience.

Sincerely,
Sue Weitz, PhD
Vice President for Student Life