UHS Self-Care and Self-Isolation Recommendations for Students With Flu or Influenza-Like Illness

Stay Home Until You’re Completely Fever-Free

The CDC recommends that people who develop influenza-like illness (fever of at least 100°F / 37.8°C with either cough or sore throat) should stay home and “self-isolate” until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever and fever symptoms (without fever-reducing medication). This guideline applies whether or not you are taking antiviral medication.

For most people, this is a period of 3 to 5 days. People who work in a healthcare setting should stay home for 7 days from the onset of symptoms or until all symptoms have resolved, whichever is longer (for more about healthcare settings, see www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidelines_infection_control.htm).

“Self-Isolating” Means...

You should not go to class or work during this time. Cancel your appointments, and don’t go to the libraries, the Union, the SERF, the NAT, restaurants, stores, or social gatherings. Avoid using public transportation. If you have relatives near enough to drive to pick you up, we strongly recommend that you recuperate at their house, particularly if you live in a residence hall. Stay in a separate room with the door closed as much as possible, and use a separate bathroom from others in the household if you can.

According to the CDC, people are most infectious (shed the most influenza virus) during the period when they have fever. People may continue shedding virus, though at lower levels, for several days after fever ends, so even after you resume your activities, please continue frequent and thorough hand washing and shielding others by coughing and sneezing into your sleeve or a tissue.

Take Care of Yourself

- Drink fluids to stay hydrated.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Manage fever and body aches with ibuprofen and acetaminophen, as directed.
- Don’t expect too much of yourself. People with flu generally feel weak, achy, and extremely fatigued for a few days to a week, so give yourself time to recover.
- If your symptoms don’t seem to be improving after 3 to 4 days, call your healthcare provider.

Seek Immediate Medical Attention if You Experience...

- shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- severe or persistent vomiting
- confusion or sudden dizziness
- flu symptoms that improve but then suddenly return with fever and worse cough

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Protect Your “Household Contacts”

Tell the people you live with that you have flu. People who have “high-risk” medical conditions should not be helping bring you food or medicine. “High-risk” does not mean a person has a greater chance of catching flu. It does mean that a person could get more serious symptoms if she did catch it. People with “high-risk” conditions (asthma or other chronic pulmonary disease; cancer; cardiovascular disease; diabetes; pregnancy; weakened immune system; or blood, liver, kidney, or neurological disorders) should call their healthcare providers for advice; in some cases, medication may be prescribed to help prevent influenza.

People who live with you should step up their hand washing. You should wear a surgical mask or bandanna over your nose and mouth when you will be in close contact with them (within 6 feet), such as if they bring you food or medicine. Limit the number of people who help care for you.

Encourage everyone to use standard disinfectant household spray cleaners and disposable disinfectant wipes to wipe down commonly touched surfaces such as remote controls, bathroom faucets, doorknobs, and microwave and refrigerator door handles.

Flu is not spread through food or water, but it can spread through sharing dishes, cups, and utensils.

Be vigilant about your own hand washing and covering your cough. Have a separate towel clearly dedicated to each person in the household. When you recover, wash your own bed sheets and towels, and bag the trash from your room and take it straight to the outdoor trash container.

For more information: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance_homecare.htm

Tell Your Instructors and Employer You Will Be Out Until You’re Better

Here’s an example of what you could say.

Dear __________________________

On __________ date ________, I developed a fever and other symptoms that indicate I may have influenza. In accordance with CDC recommendations and the campus’s request, I will be staying home while I recover to help limit the spread of disease in Madison. I expect to be out at least until __________ date ________, and I know it will be my responsibility to make up the work I missed when I am well again. I’m sorry for the inconvenience.

If You Absolutely Must Go Out While You’re Sick...

Wash your hands thoroughly before leaving the house. Cover your nose and mouth with a surgical mask or bandanna. Be vigilant about covering your cough with your sleeve, handkerchief, or tissues.

For additional information, go to www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/exclusion.htm or flu.wisc.edu.

9/1/09
UHS Flu Self-Care and Self-Isolation Checklist for Students

☐ Keep your nose and mouth covered with a surgical mask as you travel home.
☐ Stay away from work and class and all public places until you’re completely fever-free (3 to 5 days for most people).
☐ Contact your professor and employer to let them know you will be out sick.
☐ If you can, go to a nearby relative’s house to recuperate (without using public transportation).
☐ If you will need groceries or other supplies, call a friend to drop them off for you rather than going into a store. Do you have enough...
  ○ Acetaminophen and ibuprofen for fever and body aches
  ○ Fluids that you like, such as juice, sports drinks, herbal tea, Popsicles
  ○ Food for you; food for your pet
  ○ Facial tissues, toilet paper
  ○ Hand sanitizer
  ○ Disinfectant household spray cleaner, disposable disinfectant wipes
  ○ Hand sanitizer
  ○ A thermometer to monitor your temperature

☐ If you’re staying in a household with other people, tell them you have the flu. Limit their exposure by staying in a room by yourself with the door closed, using a separate bathroom if possible, covering your face with a surgical mask or bandanna whenever you leave the room or they come into yours, and encouraging everyone to wash hands well and often and use disinfectant cleaners/wipes on shared surfaces.

☐ Take care of yourself
  ○ Drink fluids to stay hydrated
  ○ Get plenty of rest
  ○ Eat what you can
  ○ Manage fever and body aches with ibuprofen and acetaminophen
  ○ Don’t expect too much of yourself. The flu makes people weak, achy, and exhausted, so give yourself time to recover.

☐ Call your healthcare provider if symptoms don’t improve after 3 to 4 days.

☐ Seek immediate medical attention if you experience...
  ○ Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
  ○ Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
  ○ Severe or persistent vomiting
  ○ Confusion or sudden dizziness
  ○ Flu symptoms that improve but then suddenly return with fever and worse cough

☐ When you recover, wash your own sheets and towels, bag all the used tissues and other trash in your room and take it directly to the outside trash bin, and use a disinfectant cleaner on all the hard surfaces in your room and all shared rooms in the house (especially bathroom and kitchen).

☐ Even after you’re fever-free, you could shed virus for a couple of days, so continue hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes to protect others.