

Dear MHC Community,

As we begin another academic year, the threat from H1N1 that dominated our thinking for the fall of 2009 has greatly receded. However, deaths from H1N1 influenza continue to occur in many parts of the world, and strains of the influenza virus emerge each fall and winter. We have learned from the H1N1 experience, and we continue our campus-wide planning for the prevention and management of all communicable disease within our community.

There are several **prevention strategies** all students should adopt:

- obtain the recommended vaccinations
- practice good respiratory hygiene--e.g., cover your cough or cough into your elbow
- be consistent with good hand washing
- maintain proper rest and nutrition
- report flu-like symptoms to the Health Center

I urge all MHC families to develop contingency plans to manage communicable illness should it arise. This includes planning for your student to be isolated with your family when feasible. All efforts will be made by faculty and staff to help students keep up with their course work during any period of isolation and recuperation.

The Health Center provides accessible acute care services for students who develop flu-like symptoms. We have established isolation strategies that comply with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control, and we work cooperatively with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health when there is a disease occurrence or outbreak. We have ordered seasonal influenza vaccine and, although vaccine for this year has not yet been made available, we anticipate delivery in mid- to late-October. Information regarding the availability and cost of vaccine will be posted on our Web site as soon as those specifics are known. Students with chronic medical conditions that place them at an increased risk for complications from influenza are particularly encouraged to receive the vaccine.

All students are required to have the vaccine(s) to prevent measles, mumps, and rubella; students who are not immunized due to religious or medical exemptions will be required to leave the community if an outbreak occurs. Meningitis vaccine is strongly recommended for entering freshmen. Varicella (chicken pox) vaccine is not required at this time, but it is strongly encouraged. Health Services has diagnosed cases of varicella during five of the past seven years, requiring those students to be placed in isolation and excluded from classes and all campus activities.

Please refer to the Health Services Web site for a description of our services, hours of operation, and recommendations for self-care supplies. Students are encouraged to call our nursing triage line if they are uncertain about the need to come in for further evaluation or to schedule a same-day appointment.

Isolation

Currently the CDC recommends that students with influenza-like illness (ILI) should be isolated from other students until their fever has been reduced below 100 F for 24 hours. We will continue to monitor the CDC recommendations and revise our plans specific to influenza accordingly.

We expect students who require isolation due to a communicable illness and who reside within a 250-mile radius, or a four-hour drive, of the campus to return home to their families to recuperate. Families will need to transport their daughters home in a private car since public transportation is not an option when students are contagious. During the H1N1 outbreak last fall, 40 percent of the MHC students with influenza-like illness were isolated at home. This greatly reduced the spread of illness to the community and the strain on limited housing resources. Students who are not able to return home will be placed in on-campus housing specifically designated for isolation for the required period.

I would be happy to respond to any questions or concerns that you may have. Please email me:

Health-services@mtholyoke.edu or call 413-538-2170.

Wishing all a healthy 2010-2011.

Karen B. Engell RNC MS WHNP
Director of College Health Services