Dear MHC Community

As we begin another academic year, a quick review of the news reminds us that there is always a potential for communicable disease within our community. Each year the influenza virus emerges and this past year there has been an increase in the cases of measles and mumps, nationally and regionally. In recent years there have been areas within the Five College Consortium experiencing high levels of risk for Eastern Equine Encephalitis. As our students travel to and from many countries around the globe we are aware of the ongoing outbreaks of Ebola Virus, cholera, etc. Based on these experiences, we maintain our campus-wide planning for the prevention and management of communicable disease within our community.

There are several key prevention strategies all community members should adopt:

- Practice precautions for prevention of tick and mosquito borne illnesses, risk continues until the first hard frost usually in October. Please reference toe [DPH site](#) for more information.
- Obtain the required and recommended immunizations
- Practice good respiratory hygiene—e.g., cover your cough and cough into your elbow
- Be consistent with good hand washing techniques—wash long enough to sing Happy birthday twice
- Maintain proper rest and nutrition
- Seek care for severe flu like symptoms or rash with fever or blisters.

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

The Health Center provides accessible acute care services for students who develop symptoms of influenza or other viral illness. We have established isolation strategies that comply with the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and we work cooperatively with the Massachusetts Department of Health when there is a disease occurrence or outbreak. We maintain supplies of seasonal influenza vaccine. Information regarding the availability and cost of vaccine will be posted on our website as these specifics are known. All members of the community are encouraged to receive an annual “flu shot”. Members of the community with chronic medical conditions which place them at increased risk for complications from influenza are strongly encouraged to receive flu vaccine. The flu season in New England can start as early as September and last into early May. Typically the flu season is November to March.

All students are required to receive vaccines or document immunity for measles, mumps, rubella, varicella, hepatitis B, meningitis and pertussis. Students who are not immunized due to religious or medical exemptions will be required to leave the community if an outbreak occurs. The period of exclusion will vary based on the outbreak but may last up to three weeks. Students, who are ill or in
close contact with an ill student and cannot leave the campus, will be placed in isolation and restricted from all class and campus activities.

Please refer to other pages of our website 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 for evaluation.

**Isolation**

The college complies with the CDC and Massachusetts Department of Public Health recommendations and guidelines when communicable disease occurs. The Health Center conducts contact tracing, places students in isolation and requires preventative immunization as indicated by the specific guidelines. The cost of required lab testing or immunizations which are not provided free of charge by the state, will be billed consistent with our billing procedures.

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 student home in a private car since public transportation is not an option when the student is contagious. During the 2009 H1N1 outbreak, 40 percent of the MHC students with influenza-like illness were isolated at home. This greatly reduced the spread of illness within 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.

Please contact me with questions or concerns that you may have.
Email me: Health-Serivces@mtholyoke.edu or call 413-538-2170

Wishing all a healthy 2014-2015

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