

New H1N1 Guidance for Colleges and Universities Issued

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Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Department of Education (ED) Secretary Arne Duncan joined with Dr. Beth Bell, deputy director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to announce new guidance for Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) to plan for and respond to the upcoming flu season.

The guidance crafted by the scientists and doctors at the CDC is designed to help colleges and universities start planning and acting now for the impact that seasonal and 2009 H1N1 influenza could have this fall and winter on their students and faculty members, as well as other university employees.

Government officials are especially concerned about the impact of H1N1 on schools because the virus appears to disproportionately affect young people. The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recently found that younger Americans, specifically those ages 6 months to 24 years, are one of the top priority groups when it comes to the new H1N1 vaccine.

"We can all work to keep ourselves healthy now by practicing prevention, close monitoring, and using common sense," Duncan said. "We know that some students may be affected by H1N1. Our top priority is making sure that they have a way to get well, stay well, and keep learning."

"With this guidance, we're providing a menu of strategies that institutions can use to keep their facilities open, while doing what they can to reduce exposure of students, faculty, and staff -- particularly those at higher risk for complications -- from the flu."

Sebelius stressed the importance of using innovative communications strategies to reach out to students who are some of the people most at risk for H1N1 flu. She highlighted new social media tools and online toolkits that have been created to help faculty, staff, and students at colleges and universities.

The H1N1 flu appears to be impacting a group of people who not only aren't used to getting serious cases of the flu, but are not used to getting flu shots," said Sebelius. "They are also people who get their information in different ways and places than public health information has traditionally been given out. It is imperative that the public and private sector work together to reach students with critical information about the flu and teach them what to do when the flu hits their dorm room, fraternity house, or campus classroom."

HHS has created a special toolkit for administrators and students, as well some badges and widgets that can be used on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter

The new guidance suggests that the most important actions institutions can take are: to encourage and facilitate good hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes; to encourage flu vaccination for recommended groups when vaccine becomes available; and to separate sick people from well people as soon as possible.

The secretaries and the CDC stressed the need for different institutions to tailor the strategies to their own circumstances, based on their location, student population, resources, and information from local health officials about the severity and spread of flu in their area, and encouraged them to partner with local health officials and others in their community to plan for the upcoming flu season.

For the complete H1N1 guidance for higher education institutions and the special H1N1 Higher Education, visit <http://www.flu.gov/plan/school/higheredguidance.html>.

The Toolkit is available at <http://www.flu.gov/plan/school/higheredtoolkit.html>

