

H1N1 frequently asked questions for Supervisors, Managers and Chairs

Administrator Update #2 - October 22, 2009

Mount Royal University (MRU) is continuing to monitor the potential and actual impacts of the seasonal flu and H1N1 situation in our community in conjunction with Alberta Health Services (AHS). As further information becomes available and as the situation changes, we may have to change our processes and responses to certain questions and situations. We will update this document regularly as the responses change and/or additional questions are asked. We will update this website as soon as possible after changes have been made. If you have any questions that you would like to be addressed or included on the document, please send them to Chad Seerup, Disability Management Consultant, Human Resources (cseerup@mtroyal.ca) and we will include them on the next update.

1) Overview of H1N1 and hygiene practices relating H1N1

a) What is H1N1?

H1N1 flu virus is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of the regular human seasonal flu. H1N1 flu virus has been reported around the world, and the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared it a pandemic influenza virus.

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), Alberta Health and Wellness, and Alberta Health Services continue to monitor and respond to the spread of H1N1. In most instances, H1N1 flu cases in Alberta continue to be associated with relatively mild symptoms typical of usual influenza.

b) What are the symptoms?

The following information outlines symptoms and what to do if you have symptoms as outlined by the Alberta Health Services website. The symptoms of pandemic H1N1 influenza virus in Canada have been generally mild, but illness can be severe for some individuals. The symptoms are similar to seasonal influenza and may include:

- **Sudden onset** of fever and cough;
- Lethargy;
- Muscle aches;
- Lack of appetite;
- Some people with Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 have also reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea in addition to a cough and fever symptoms. The vast majority of cases have recovered completely.

c) How is H1N1 flu virus spread?

H1N1 flu virus is mainly spread person-to-person through coughing or sneezing by people infected with the H1N1 flu virus. People may also become infected by touching something with the H1N1 flu virus on it, such as counters or doorknobs, and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

d) **How can I reduce the risk of getting H1N1 flu virus?**

Wash your hands regularly with warm water and regular soap, especially after you cough or sneeze.

- When you can't wash your hands, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, throw the tissue in the trash right after you use it, and wash or sanitize your hands right away.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough and sneeze into your upper arm or sleeve.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as germs can spread that way.

2) **Managing employee illness, absence or leave requests**

a) **What if an employee calls into work and indicates that they are concerned that they may have H1N1 or influenza-like illness? What is the process?** [updated Oct 22]

If an employee is experiencing influenza-like symptoms, they should be advised to stay home and call Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-5465 or 403-943-LINK (6465) for more information and direction as to what to do. Please refer to FAQ question #2 b) below regarding the information that can be requested if an employee is calling in sick.

If an employee has been advised to stay at home, they should follow the Mount Royal University process for calling into their department. Departments should develop a process for reporting absence from work which takes into consideration the possibility that the manager or supervisor may be absent themselves.

Prior to any employee phone calls, your department should be educated on what to look for and what to do. For more information please refer to the [Alberta Health Services](#) website. Please be conscious in how this information is delivered, you do not want to increase employee anxieties surrounding this issue.

You can provide your employee with the following information from Alberta Health Services:

If you have symptoms of a respiratory illness, you should:

- Limit unnecessary contact with others.
- Call Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-5465 or 403-943-LINK (5465) for more information regarding respiratory illness and considerations of your attendance at work.
- If your symptoms worsen (e.g. shortness of breath, dehydration, worsening fever, cough or weakness), contact your health-care provider or visit your nearest health-care centre. Make sure to communicate your symptoms to your health-care provider over the phone prior to attending their office.
- As your symptoms decrease follow the advice of Health Link or your healthcare provider regarding return to work and advise your supervisor accordingly.

b) **What information can I or should I ask for if an employee calls in reporting influenza – like illness?**
[updated Oct 22]

The questions that can be asked are specifically this:

- Are you are ill with flu-like symptoms?
- If yes, please ask them the first day that their symptoms appeared.
- Ask what their anticipated return to work date is.

It is important to note that if employees are not absent as a result of flu-like symptoms, the only information that you can request related to their medical condition is the expected time line for them to return to work.

c) **Does an employee require a medical note for absences related to illness leave?**

Article 22 of the Support Staff Collective Agreement and Article 11.2 of the Faculty Collective Agreement regarding illness leave still apply.

In some situations employees may be told by Public Health or by their physician not to visit a physician's office if they are suffering from influenza-like symptoms. During the pandemic period the University may not require a medical note in relation to this type of situation. However, the University will reserve the right to require medical documentation in some circumstances.

d) **What if an employee is advised to stay off work because of concerns with H1N1 however they have no more casual available?**

The employee should be advised to stay home. If this situation arises and you would like to discuss this further please contact Human Resources as each situation is unique.

e) **What if an employee is at work and is portraying the signs of H1N1?**

Speak or communicate with the employee about how they are feeling. Any communication surrounding an employee's health should be done in private and kept confidential. In a situation where the employee is clearly displaying symptoms of influenza-like illness (sudden onset of fever and cough; lethargy, muscle aches and lack of appetite) they should be directed to go home and self isolate following the Alberta Health Services self isolation guidelines.

f) **What do I do if a number of my staff are away due to H1N1 or influenza –like illness? How do I cover for these employees?**

As soon as possible establish a business continuity plan for your department or area.

Some considerations may include:

- Identify back up coverage
- Determine essential services in order of priority
- Develop a plan with input from employees within the unit
- Ensure plan is communicated to the appropriate individuals

g) **What if one of my employees refuses to come to work for fear of exposure to H1N1?**

Advise them that an absence due to perceived fear of exposure is not covered under Mount Royal's casual or general illness leave. The employee may choose to use other types of leave (eg. vacation, flex, personal days). Reinforce that MRU is continually monitoring the situation and decisions will be made to ensure that the workplace remains safe.

h) **How should I advise one of my employees if they have indicated that they have been in contact with someone with influenza like illness?**

Unless an employee is displaying influenza-like symptoms or if they have been advised by their healthcare provider not to attend work, they are expected to be at work. As indicated by Alberta Health Services employees should only self isolate if they are experiencing influenza-like symptoms.

i) **Do I need to advise other employees of a possible H1N1 exposure in the workplace?** [updated Oct 22]

No. Following a call from an employee/faculty member with the flu, please complete the MRU Influenza Report. This report should be kept confidential and forwarded to Jane O'Connor at joconnor@mtroyal.ca on the day that you receive the call. The report should be updated and forwarded to Jane with each new episode and when an employee previously reported as ill returns to work. The need for wider notification will be assessed by Mount Royal in conjunction with Alberta Health Services. Keep reinforcing self-care and prevention. It is important at all times to maintain employee confidentiality.

j) **What if I have an employee that is the primary care giver for an individual with H1N1 or influenza like symptoms and needs to take care of them?**

In the situation where there are no other options for dependent care for the individual with influenza like symptoms then it is reasonable for the employee to be given a leave.

Some options for support staff may include family illness days, personal leave day, vacation, flex time, accrued time, overtime and leave of absence without pay. Employees should contact Human Resources to discuss their options.

Options for faculty would need to be addressed within each unit.

3) **Additional questions**

a) **What is Mount Royal University doing to prepare for a pandemic outbreak?**

Mount Royal has been preparing to respond to a pandemic outbreak for several years. The Public Health Response Team is in place and will respond appropriately as issues arise. Infection prevention and control measures have been implemented including installation of hand sanitizing stations in key public areas, installation of signage for recommended hand washing in washrooms, and the launch of an education/awareness campaign.

b) **What are the responsibilities of all staff, faculty and students?**

All members of the Mount Royal community are asked to:

- Follow recommendations provided by Alberta Health Services and Mount Royal to help stop the spread of infection.
- Monitor www.mtroyal.ca for the latest official information on H1N1 at Mount Royal.

- Have a personal preparedness plan should you or a family member become ill.
- Adhere to the practices outlined within this document

c) **Where can I get more information?**

Please continue to monitor www.mtroyal.ca for the latest information on the H1N1 flu situation.

The following web resources also contain information related to the H1N1 virus:

- [Health Link Alberta](http://www.healthlinkalberta.ca) (www.healthlinkalberta.ca)
- [Alberta Health Services](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca) (www.albertahealthservices.ca)
- [Alberta Health and Wellness](http://www.health.alberta.ca) (www.health.alberta.ca)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada](http://www.phac-aspc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1/) (www.phac-aspc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1/)
- [World Health Organization](http://www.who.int/en/) (www.who.int/en/)