



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

BACKGROUND

- **What is pandemic influenza (aka flu)?**

The term pandemic influenza refers to a world-wide spread of a new influenza virus – the current virus of concern is the H1N1 virus. Because it is new, most people do not have immunity to it.

- **What is the University doing to prepare for the pandemic influenza?**

The University of Manitoba has been involved in pandemic planning and has developed an institutional plan. Deans, Directors, and Heads of Administrative Units have also been requested to develop their own unit plans in a template format. A Pandemic Planning Committee is actively involved in overseeing and communicating the planning activities.

- **How is the virus transmitted?**

The H1N1 virus is spread like other seasonal / annual influenzas – person-to-person through close contact with droplets produced by coughing or sneezing. Although people are most infectious to others while they are sick with the flu, the virus can be spread about a day before symptoms begin and sometimes even if symptoms do not appear. This is why it is important for people to take precautions at all times. The best defense against the H1N1 virus is as follows:

- Cover your cough by coughing into your elbow or sleeve or use a tissue to cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Washing your hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. Hand sanitizers are also effective.
- Reduce the spread of germs by limiting touching your eyes, nose or mouth and by washing your hands frequently.
- Maintain your health by taking care of yourself and those in your care including eating a health balanced diet, avoiding cigarette smoke and other harmful substances, being active and getting enough rest and sleep.

- **What are the symptoms of influenza?**

The symptoms of influenza include a sudden fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or higher, a cough, a runny nose and one or more of the following: sore throat, muscle aches, or physical exhaustion. If you have symptoms of a respiratory infection, you should:

- Stay home from school or work and limit unnecessary contact with others.
- Contact your health-care provider or visit your nearest health-care centre if you are concerned that you may need care – especially if your symptoms are severe or worsening.

- **How will pandemic influenza information be shared amongst the University community?**

The University will provide information regarding the H1N1 virus situation and its planning efforts through a variety of communication channels, which include the University web-site, Dean's, Directors, and Department Heads, etc..



SENDING EMPLOYEES HOME

- **May I send an employee home if he/she shows symptoms of influenza? Can the employees be required to take sick leave? Can I prevent employees from coming to work?**

The Employment Standards Code permits employers to send employees home when they present at work with influenza-like symptoms. However there are other ways to address situations in which employees have this condition. In some cases employees may be isolated from other workers by working from home, limiting their work to private offices, etc. Employees with severe symptoms and who appear to be at risk of transmitting the virus at work may be sent home with a request that they seek medical attention. It is recommended that employees keep in regular contact with their supervisor for the duration of their illness until it is agreed that a return to work is advisable.

- **May I mandate employees to stay home if members of their family are known or suspected to have influenza or they have been exposed to someone with influenza?**

The recommendation of Manitoba Health and Healthy Living is that employees should stay home only when they exhibit symptoms. Employees who think they have been exposed to someone with H1N1 should take extra care to follow personal hygiene and other preventative measures as outlined above.

LEAVE / SICK LEAVE POLICIES

- **Must an employer grant leave to an employee who is caring for a family member that is sick?**

The University has provisions for employees to make arrangements for the continuing care and supervision of a family member during a serious illness. The number of days allocated to employees is contained in the employee's collective agreement or in the University's Temporary Absences Policy and Procedures documents.

RETURN TO WORK

- **May an employer require an employee who is out sick with influenza to provide a doctor's note, submit to a medical exam, or remain symptom-free for a specified amount of time before returning to work?**

Unnecessary burdening of the health care system by requesting return to work certificates is not something the University wishes to promote. The University would rather the employee and the supervisor keep in regular contact to assess the employee's ability to return to work. A period of isolation and or working from home may be an option.



REFUSAL TO WORK

- **During an influenza pandemic, can a healthy employee refuse to come to work, travel, or perform other job duties because of a belief that by doing so, he or she would be at an increased risk of catching influenza?**

An employee has a right under the Workplace Safety and Health Act to refuse to perform dangerous work. Steps such as regular hand washing by all workers, use of protective clothing or equipment in some jobs, having work performed in isolation are valid methods of protecting all workers. A refusal to perform work is a serious matter and any such refusal should be reported to the Environmental Health and Safety Office (EHSO) and will be reviewed by the Workplace Safety and Health Division of Manitoba Labour and Immigration.

REASSIGNMENT OF WORK

- **Can an employee be required to perform work outside of the employee's job description?**

Employee's duties are not restricted to what is written in the job description. Employees are entitled to be paid the appropriate rate of pay for the performance of duties which are outside their normal job responsibilities. As part of their pandemic planning units heads have been encouraged to cross train employees to ensure adequate backup is available for critical functions.

WORKING AT HOME AND SOCIAL DISTANCING

- **May employers change work hours / schedules to minimize contact between employees?**

Yes this is another option to working in isolation or working from home.

- **Once a pandemic begins, may employers implement alternative work schedules (e.g., flex-time, staggered shifts) or alternative work arrangements (e.g., telework) to promote social distancing?**

Yes, although there are usually notice periods required to changing the hours of work of employees.