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## PANDEMIC PLANNING: FAQs FOR SUPERVISORS & EMPLOYEES

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### **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.

- ***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. Germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, where they can be picked up on hands and transferred to the lungs when someone touches their mouth and/or nose.

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:

- Wash your hands with soap and water, or use 60-90% alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available;
- Cough and sneeze into your arm or sleeve. Tissues can be used to cover coughs and sneezes but be sure to wash your hands after throwing out the tissue;
- Do not share drinking glasses, water bottles, mouth guards, cosmetics or eating utensils.

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

Seasonal influenza and H1N1 share the same set of symptoms. They are fever and/or cough, and one or more of the following:

- Unusual tiredness
- Headache
- Muscle or joint aches
- Sore throat
- Vomiting and diarrhea in children less than 5 years of age

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

Acadia has an established Emergency Response Team. We work closely with EMO Nova Scotia (Emergency Management Office) to certify and train our staff in emergency preparedness and response. We also collaborate with the Town of Wolfville Emergency Response Team and the Kings County Regional Emergency Management Organization. As part of our Emergency Response Plan, the University has a Pandemic Planning Committee chaired by the Vice-President Administration with representation from various sectors of the University community.

Acadia has also established a web site for pandemic information. It can be found at (there is also a hot link to this web site on Acadia's home page:

<http://pandemicinformation.acadiau.ca>

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

Communications to employees, students, the University community, and general public in the event of a pandemic will be coordinated by Communications and Marketing in conjunction with Technology Services.

- Web page information will be updated on a regular and timely basis.
- Email messages will be distributed to various lists.
- Telephone information line 1-902-585-INFO (4636) will provide prerecorded messaging.
- Email questions can be directed to [emergencyinformation@acadiau.ca](mailto:emergencyinformation@acadiau.ca).
- Written communications such as memos and posters will be distributed to campus.
- Public service announcements will be aired as required on local radio, which includes K-Rock (89.3 FM), AVR (97.7 FM) Magic (94.9 FM), and CBC Radio (106.5 FM).
- Immediate questions can be directed to Safety and Security 1-902-585-1103.

### **EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- ***What should I do if I am feeling ill?***

All employees are encouraged to prepare themselves and their families to avoid significant impacts due to emergency situations. Employees are expected to contact their supervisor if they are experiencing any influenza symptoms, and follow the directions of their supervisor.

- ***What do I do if the University announces that it is closed?***

Public health authorities are **not** recommending that universities/colleges close proactively in anticipation of disease or outbreaks. Closing a university/college in response to seasonal influenza and H1N1 activity is unlikely to be effective and will only be considered on a case by case basis after discussion with the Medical Officer of Health.

If a full University campus shutdown has been announced, employees are expected to:

- Report to their supervisors/managers/department heads prior to leaving campus.
- Remain off-campus during the campus shutdown with the exception of those employees identified as essential.
- Keep in contact with their supervisors/managers/department heads by phone or email and/or the University through the Main Acadia Web Site or Pandemic Information Web site to determine the state of alert on the campus and establish when they are to return.
- Listen for updates via public service announcements on local radio stations.

Once a re-opening of the campus has been announced, employees are expected to:

- Report to work on the identified day, unless they have been advised otherwise by their supervisor/manager/department head or health care provider. If they are unable to report they are to contact their supervisor/manager/department head to indicate the reason (e.g. under quarantine, nursing an infected person, are ill with flu-like symptoms.)

Acadia's closure policy can be found at:

[http://www.acadiau.ca/human/main\\_sections/files/University\\_Policies/Closure\\_of\\_University.pdf](http://www.acadiau.ca/human/main_sections/files/University_Policies/Closure_of_University.pdf)

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### 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?***

You can 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 Nova Scotia Department of Health recommends that staff and faculty who are ill with influenza-like symptoms, regardless of whether it maybe seasonal influenza or H1N1, should:

- Remain at home until they are symptom-free, feeling well and able to resume normal day-to-day activities
- Avoid close contact with others
- See a health care practitioner if symptoms worsen

### SICK LEAVE:

- ***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 Terms of Employment.:

[http://www.acadiu.ca/human/main\\_sections/files/COLLECTIVE\\_AGREEMENTS/homepage\\_collective\\_agreements.htm](http://www.acadiu.ca/human/main_sections/files/COLLECTIVE_AGREEMENTS/homepage_collective_agreements.htm)

- ***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 *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to refuse to perform dangerous work. Steps such as regular hand washing by all workers, use of protective clothing or equipment in some

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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 a supervisor and to the University's Occupational Health and Safety Officer, and will be reviewed by the University's Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee and/or the Occupational Health and Safety Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Labour.

### **REASSIGNMENT OF WORK / CHANGES IN WORK SCHEDULES:**

- ***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, unit heads are being encouraged to cross-train employees to ensure adequate backup is available for critical functions.

- ***If a pandemic begins, may employers implement alternative work schedules (e.g., flex-time, staggered shifts) or alternative work arrangements (e.g., telework) to minimize contact between employees?***

Yes, this is another option to working in isolation or working from home. A notice period may be required prior to changing the hours of work of employees.