

H1N1 flu (swine flu)

Frequently asked questions

Q: What precautions can I take?

A: Wash your hands frequently with soap and water and use Purall hand sanitizer that has been placed in most University Buildings. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze (then throw out the tissue). If you are ill, stay home to protect others.

Q: What else should I do?

A: Stay informed of the latest developments regarding H1N1. As information about this outbreak is constantly changing, please check the GVSU Web site www.gvsu.edu/emergency/. This site also has links to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/h1n1 and the World Health Organization at www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/ for the most-updated information about H1N1.

Q: Is there a vaccine for the swine flu?

A: An H1N1 vaccine is currently in production and should be ready for the public in October, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A priority list can be viewed at www.cdc.gov/h1n1.

Q: What do I do if I think have the flu?

A: H1N1 flu, like other flu, is a respiratory illness. The common symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. If you have a fever along with other symptoms, please call your medical provider. Seek urgent medical attention if the following warning signs appear: difficulty breathing or shortness of breath; pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen; confusion; fever higher than 102 degrees.

Q: What is Tamiflu, and should I be taking it?

A: Tamiflu is an anti-viral medicine available by prescription. However, at this time the public health recommendation is that Tamiflu only be used if

your physician determines you are ill with H1N1 and that you are at increased risk for complications. This strain of flu already is developing some resistance to anti-viral medications, and unnecessary use or overuse of antiviral medications may make them ineffective when they are really needed.

Q: Will established absentee guidelines/policies/procedures be followed?

A: Yes. Departments will be expected to maintain their existing departmental absence policies during a pandemic situation. Faculty and staff will continue to be responsible for complying with the established work schedule and existing absence reporting policies.

In the event that faculty or staff wishes to stay home to avoid exposure, he/she is expected to comply with existing departmental policies. To be considered an authorized absence, the time off must be approved by the supervisor in advance. Pay for this time would be vacation time if available or no-pay time.

Q: Can faculty or staff be sent home if they are sick?

A: Yes, faculty and staff may be sent home if they are sick. Pay for this time would be consistent with salary continuation, sick leave or unpaid leave policies.

Q: If I am required to stay home, will I get paid?

A: It is unlikely that the University will be closed due to the H1N1 virus. However, in the event of a short term closure, faculty and staff will continue to be paid. If a University closure became a long term event the Senior Management Team will plan accordingly.

Q: Can faculty and staff be asked why they are sick, i.e. flu related?

A: Faculty and staff may be asked the reason for their absence only by their supervisor according to existing policies.

Q: Can I adjust my work schedule or telecommute during a pandemic situation?

A: Where possible, schedules may be adjusted and telecommuting may be available subject to supervisory approval.

Q: Can my supervisor mandate that I cancel my vacation?

A: Yes, consistent with existing policies, a supervisor may cancel or deny a request for vacation in order to meet the business needs of the unit.

Q: Can I be required to report to work during a pandemic situation?

A: Yes. While the safety of all faculty and staff is our first concern, the ability to maintain vital and critical functions may require certain faculty and staff to report to work. In the unlikely event of a pandemic situation and a decision was made to close the University, the University Closing Policy will be followed and precautionary measures would be implemented

Q: Can faculty and staff be asked to work outside their job classification and/or in another department?

A: Yes, an emergency situation might require working outside of normal job responsibilities. The college/department for which work is performed is responsible for compensation at the individual's regular base rate for their original classification/appointment. Support staff represented by unions will be compensated in accordance with the terms of their collective bargaining agreement or existing practices.

Q: What will happen to my benefits in the event my accruals, paid leave, and/or FMLA leave run out before I am able to return to work?

A: It is unlikely that paid sick leave benefits would run out due to illness from the H1N1 virus. If faculty and staff are unable to return to work due to illness and have exhausted their sick leave or salary continuation, and FMLA leave (if applicable) they may request to be placed on an unpaid leave of absence. Faculty and staff may continue benefit coverage during an unpaid leave of absence by making premium payments. Retirement contributions are suspended during the unpaid leave period.

Q: How does Workers' Compensation apply in a pandemic situation?

A: Workers' compensation is a system established by state law that provides wage replacement, medical, and rehabilitation benefits to workers who are injured on the job. Because it is extremely difficult to trace the origin of a

communicable disease, an illness such as the flu is usually not a covered illness.

Q: Can I apply for Long-Term disability (LTD)?

A: It is very unlikely that this virus will cause such a long term illness, however, to be eligible for LTD, you must meet the definition of a disability, as defined by the University's long term disability insurance carrier. For eligible faculty and staff, benefits normally begin following the completion of 180 days of continuous disability if unable to work due to sickness or bodily injury.

Q: Can I apply for FMLA if I contract the flu or if I have a family member who is ill?

A: Ordinarily, unless complications arise, the flu does not meet the definition of a serious health condition under the FMLA. A serious health condition entitling faculty and staff to FMLA leave means an illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that involves inpatient care or continuing treatment by a health care provider.

If faculty or staff is granted FMLA leave, the FMLA leave runs concurrent with existing paid/unpaid leaves of absence taken for FMLA-qualifying purposes. Health, prescription, and dental benefits will continue with the normal University and employee contribution(s) for the duration of the FMLA leave, even if the employee paid accruals have been exhausted.

Q: How will unemployment compensation apply in a pandemic situation?

A: If faculty or staff is out of work due to illness, he/she would generally be ineligible for unemployment benefits because one must be able and available for full time work in order to be eligible for benefits. If faculty or staff are out of work due to his/her own choice, he/she would likely be ineligible for benefits because he/she would not be considered unemployed through no fault of his/her own. If the faculty or staff is able to work, but out of work due to layoff (lack of work, lack of funds, other cause) he/she would likely be eligible for benefits.

Q: Will I get paid if the payroll department operations are suspended due to a pandemic situation?

A: This is very unlikely, however, an important component of each department's pandemic planning is operational preparedness to identify its critical functions and the personnel required to carry them out. The Controller's Office has conducted pandemic planning, including processing payroll in a timely manner. All plans are in place to process payroll as a crucial priority, but in the event this is not possible, communications will be issued via appropriate websites and emails providing relevant information.