**Prevention and Control of Influenza**

**Student Health 716-286-8390**

With the current rise of influenza cases in New York State and across the country, all of us here at Niagara University need to remember the basics that help boost our immunity and put into practice on a daily basis the simple common-sense things that help prevent and contain the spread of upper respiratory illnesses. Due to the unique lifestyles of college students, such as classroom settings and living conditions, the flu (as well as other respiratory and gastrointestinal viruses) can spread rapidly on a campus.

**What is influenza?**

The flu is a respiratory illness caused by the influenza viruses. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, sometimes called the "stomach flu" are not the primary symptoms of influenza.

**How do I differentiate the flu from other respiratory illnesses?**

Influenza has a rapid rather than a gradual onset with chills, fatigue, headache, muscle aches and a high fever (102-104 degrees Fahrenheit or greater). A dry cough, runny nose and sore throat are also typical. Occasionally these symptoms may be accompanied by some nausea and/or vomiting. The majority of these symptoms subside within five to six days. However, the respiratory symptoms may last for as long as two weeks before resolving completely and fatigue and depressed appetite may last even longer. The flu can be diagnosed based on the above history and confirmed with a test specific for influenza performed on a nasal swab.

Though the flu may make you uncomfortable, most people recover from it uneventfully. Antibiotics are of no use in the treatment of flu and other viral illness. The body's immune system cures most viral illnesses. Some people may experience complication including pneumonia, bronchitis, sinus infections, etc. People with underlying chronic illnesses are most at risk of complications.

**How does the flu spread?**

Normal seasonal influenza and other respiratory viruses are usually spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The flu can also be spread via contact with objects such as door handles, telephones, keyboards or faucets that have been contaminated with the flu virus. A person then touches their mouth, eyes or nose and the virus starts reproducing in the mucous membranes. Once the flu (or any other viral illness) is seen it is difficult to contain an outbreak within the classroom and residence hall setting as someone with the flu can be contagious for one to two days prior to the onset of illness and for about five days after symptoms begin.

**How can I avoid the flu?**

Get an annual flu shot. This is your best option for preventing seasonal flu. Flu Shots are still available at Student Health (716-286-8390). A flu shot does not guarantee that you will not get the flu as each year's vaccine is based on an estimate of which variant of the virus will be circulating. Even if it does not prevent the flu, the vaccine should at least lessen its severity.

The well student can decrease his chances of contracting the flu and many other illnesses by following these guidelines:

* Keep your resistance up by eating a balanced diet and getting adequate sleep and exercise.
* Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Keep a distance of three feet or more from a person who is visibly ill with coughing and sneezing.
* Wash your hands frequently or use a hand sanitizer after handling potentially dirty or contaminated surfaces. Use a paper towel or your elbow to turn off the faucet after hand washing as viruses may live on surfaces for two hours or more.
* Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

**Where can I find more information on influenza?**

* Center for Disease Control - [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov/)
* N.Y.S. Department of health – <https://www.health.ny.gov/>