

August 18, 2009

Dear Johns Hopkins Students:

All around the university, faculty members and staff are preparing to welcome you to a new academic year. The opening weeks of this fall semester will be particularly special, with—in addition to the excitement that always launches a new term—a number of events on our campuses to mark the official inauguration of Ron Daniels as Johns Hopkins' 14th president.

As we plan for classes to begin, we also have spent considerable time planning for possible outbreaks this fall of H1N1 flu.

All indications thus far are that the virulence of the H1N1 virus remains relatively low; most patients suffer relatively mild symptoms, comparable with those of seasonal flu. Though some patients become seriously ill, most recover quickly and without complications.

Models put together by experts from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health indicate that—even if H1N1 is widespread this fall and many of us fall ill at one time or another—the number of sick students, faculty, and staff at any one time is likely to be relatively small.

Our current plan, therefore, is to conduct academic business as usual and not to alter the semester or quarter schedules in any way. We will, however, remind faculty members to be mindful that we are in a worldwide pandemic; we will ask them to be particularly flexible in their expectations of students who become ill.

In return, we ask the following of you:

- If you become sick with flu-like symptoms, don't come to class until you have been symptom-free, without benefit of medication, for at least 24 hours. Leave home only if you need to seek additional medical attention.
- If you are ill, immediately contact your professors by phone or e-mail and make arrangements with them to make up missed work. Faculty members are very willing to work with you once they know you are ill.
- Do not resume your normal activities until you have been symptom-free, without benefit of medication, for at least 24 hours.

As a professor in the Bloomberg School of Public Health, I must, of course use this opportunity to urge that we prevent unnecessary illnesses by redoubling our adherence to standard precautions against spreading flu in our community:

- Always cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, and dispose of the tissue in the trash immediately. If you have no tissue, cover your cough or sneeze with your arm rather than your hand.
- Wash your hands, thoroughly and often, with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective and can be carried with you for use when soap and water are not available.
- To help prevent spreading germs, avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

There is, of course, at least a small possibility that the H1N1 virus will mutate this fall and become more dangerous and even more lethal. If that happens, we may need to act more aggressively to prevent infection of students by suspending classes and closing residence and dining halls.

There is more information and advice at the federal government's H1N1 Web site: www.flu.gov and at the CDC's web site, www.cdc.gov (click on the green "H1N1 flu info" box to the right of the page).

Thank you in advance for following the guidelines outlined in this message. We very much look forward to seeing you soon and beginning a great semester together.

Sincerely,

Scott L. Zeger
Interim Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs