

Portland State University H1N1 Influenza FAQs for Employees

September 17, 2009

Use these questions and answers as a guide, as they may not cover all situations. Contact Student Health And Counseling (SHAC) with any health-related questions not addressed here. Contact the Office of Human Resources with any employment or payroll questions not addressed here.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Q1. What is the H1N1 flu (formerly known as “swine flu”)?

A1. The H1N1 “swine” flu is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by a type ‘A’ influenza virus that regularly causes outbreaks of influenza among pigs. H1N1 flu is different from seasonal flu, and may be circulating at the same time as seasonal flu.

Q2. What are the symptoms?

A2. Symptoms are similar to seasonal flu and may include:

- Fever (greater than 100°F or 37.8°)
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Stuffy nose
- Chills
- Headache and body aches
- Fatigue
- Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting.

Q3. What can I do to prevent or limit my exposure?

A3. Follow the recommendations of the State Public Health Director:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve, not with your hand.
- Stay home if you are sick. (Follow policy, and collective bargaining agreements.)
- Try to avoid contact with people who are ill.
- Practice other good health habits such as eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, getting sufficient rest and not smoking.
- For more information on preventative care go to:
 - www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm
 - www.cdc.gov/cleanhands/
 - www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance_homecare.htm

Q4. What policies or collective bargaining agreement provisions apply in the case of a pandemic?

A4. Portland State University will operate according to normal policy and procedures, personnel policies, rules and collect bargaining agreements, except in the event of a declared state of emergency by the Governor or a Public Health Advisory issued by the State Public Health Director.

Q5. Is the H1N1 flu considered a 'serious health condition' under OFLA or FMLA?

A5. Treat the flu like you would any other illness. Although flu is generally not a serious health condition under FMLA/OFLA, H1N1 flu can be a qualifying event if it meets the serious health condition criteria (for example, absence plus treatment, or in-patient hospitalization). For information about eligibility and procedures to request FMLA/OFLA review, see www.pdx.edu/hr/family_medical_leave. If you need to request FMLA/OFLA leave for your own serious health condition or to care for a family member with a serious health condition under FMLA or OFLA, contact the PSU Leaves Manager at 503-725-9686.

Q6. Can I require the employee to obtain a release from a doctor before I allow her/him back in the work place? For example, an employee who was on vacation in a n affected area is experiencing influenza like symptoms, and extended the time off by taking additional leave.

A6. As of August 2009, the Department of Human Services advises that a physician's release to return to work should not be required unless the employee was on approved FMAL/OFLA or there is reasonable suspicion that the employee is still contagious.

Q7. If an employee comes to work and is experiencing influenza type symptoms, what options are available to an employee?

A7. The employee may choose to notify his/her supervisor and go home on sick leave. For information about pay during periods of illness scroll down to the "Absence from Work Involving Illness" table on the Office of Human Resources website: www.pdx.edu/hr/university_closure_policy#AFW. [Temporary Telework](#) may be an option for some positions. The employee's supervisor will determine if temporary telework is acceptable.

Q8. Can a supervisor send an employee home who appears to exhibit influenza type symptoms?

A8. Yes, a supervisor may require an employee to leave work if there is reason to believe that the employee is a health hazard to others or that the employee's illness is interfering with his or her ability to perform the job. If a supervisor sends an employee home, for both FLSA Exempt and Non-Exempt employees, we will pay the employee for the remainder of the shift for that day only. Employees should record the paid leave as "Other" and should note the paid leave was at the supervisor's direction.

Q9. If an employee who exhibits or experiences influenza type symptoms goes home from work either voluntarily or non-voluntarily, can PSU require a release from a doctor prior to the employee returning to the workplace?

A9. It is not recommended unless there is reason to believe an employee's return to work would be a health hazard to the employee or others or that the employee's health condition would interfere with his or her ability to perform the job. If flu affects a large population, medical releases will complicate care delivery to people who are sick.

As of August 2009, the Oregon Department of Public Health recommends that employees who experience flu symptoms should not return to work until they have been free of fever (without fever reducing medication) for a least 24 hours. A doctor's release should not be required unless there are medical circumstances other than flu that has resolved. However, returning employees should be advised to exercise good hand-washing and cough control practices when they return.

A supervisor should provide the employee with notice if a release from a doctor may be required to return to work. The employee's department pays any uninsured expenses related to required Medical Certifications. An employee must submit receipts for uninsured expenses to receive reimbursement.

Q10. If employee 'A' comes to work ill and employee 'B' is concerned about getting sick from being exposed to employee 'A', what options does employee 'B' have?

A10. Employee 'B' may request, subject to supervisory approval, to use vacation, compensatory time, or leave without pay. At the supervisor's discretion and where acceptable, telecommuting may be permitted. This situation does not excuse an employee from performing their assigned duties. Refer to policies and collective bargaining agreements.

Q11. At what point can a supervisor discuss health issues with an employee?

Q11. When there is a reasonable belief that the employee is ill and the illness may affect the health or safety of others, the supervisor should raise the issue with the employee. The supervisor should discuss respectfully and in private his/her concern for the employee and the affect on others in the workplace. The supervisor should not ask the employee to disclose personal medical information beyond what is observable.

Q12. If my child's school or child care closes and I have to stay home with my child who is not ill, what type of leave do I use?

A12. Subject to supervisory approval, you may request to use vacation, compensatory time or leave without pay as outlined on the Office of Human Resources website: www.pdx.edu/hr/university_closure_policy#AFW (scroll

down to the "Absence from Work Involving Illness" table. [Temporary Telework](#) may be an option for some positions.

Q13. PSU's sick leave policy allows an employee to use sick leave if the employee has had an "exposure to contagious disease." What is an "exposure to" H1N1 flu?

A13. The current guidance from Oregon Public Health is that any person with respiratory illness symptoms and a temperature of at least 100°F should be considered exposed and infectious. Some types of exposure are simple to identify, and others depend on specific facts and circumstances. A person who is the primary care-giver for a family member with the flu could likely have been exposed. Exposure to H1N1 can also mean that a person has been exposed to respiratory fluids, for instance droplets or aerosols that can be transmitted to another person within about 3 feet of an infected person's uncovered sneeze. We encourage anyone who is asymptomatic and believes an exposure has occurred to use sick leave at least through the 1-3 day incubation period before flu becomes evident. Check at www.flu.oregon.gov for the latest information on how long after an exposure a person will have symptoms.

Q14. If an employee's child gets the flu and someone other than the employee cares for the child, can the employee come to work?

A14. See the guidance in A13.

Q15. What if an employee needs to stay home to care for his or her child but the employee does not have accrued sick leave?

A15. Follow normal policies and collective bargaining agreement provisions. The employee may request, in the following order until all applicable leave is exhausted, compensatory time, or a sick leave advance. Alternatively, the supervisor may determine if temporary telework is available, or may approve leave without pay.

OFFICE/UNIT CLOSURES

Q16. Are PSU office employees required to work if their office or unit is closed due to illness?

A16. Because H1N1 flu may persist over an extended period of time, supervisors will provide communications and work plans to essential personnel that may be required to work onsite or offsite during a closure. Temporary telework may be an option for some positions. The employee's supervisor will determine if telework is acceptable. Refer to PSU's [Temporary Telework](#) policy.

Q17. Who decides if an office should close and under what circumstances?

A17. Assessing whether an office should close will occur on a case-by-case basis, and the decision to close an office is ultimately the President's.

Q18. Should our office/unit cancel discretionary functions, such as public outreach events?

A18. This decision should be based on the most current information on the severity and transmission of flu. Follow the recommendations of the Public Health Division. Requests for Public Health Division advice should go through PSU's Emergency Management Unit at 503-725-2220.

Q19. If campus closes, does PSU pay employees or do the employees use accrued leave?

A19. If campus closes, the leave use and pay rules for [Closures for Prevention or Containment of Disease](#) apply.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

Q20. If an employee works in a direct public contact position, and is reluctant to come to work for fear of exposure from the public, what options are available to the employee?

A20. The employee may request, subject to supervisory approval, to use vacation, President's Leave, or compensatory time. Subject to operational requirement and the discretion of management, an employee may use a mask, hand sanitizer, or wipes, if this will help the employee feel comfortable in the performance of his or her duties.

Q21. Is a department required to purchase masks, hand sanitizer, or any personal protective equipment for employees?

A21. Typically, an employer makes such purchases at the discretion of management. If required because of specific occupations, a department's management would pay for such items.

TRAVEL POLICIES

Q22. If an employee gets the flu while on business travel (i.e. the employee is unable to fulfill the purpose of travel or must stay in a place additional days), will the agency pay his or her per diem and lodging?

A22. Yes. This can be included as a travel expense, provided the employee has used available sick leave for the additional days.

A23. If an employee is on travel status and his or her flight is cancelled or delayed due to illness prevention, will the agency pay his or her per diem and lodging?

A23. Yes. This is included as a travel expense.