August 28, 2009 (2 pages)

To: NC Public and Independent Colleges and Universities

From: Megan Davies, MD, State Epidemiologist

Re: Control of Pandemic Influenza A (H1N1) in Institutions of Higher Education

Pandemic influenza A (H1N1) continues to cause illness around the world, particularly among children and young adults. Outbreaks of flu-like illness have already been reported in college and university settings, and are likely to increase. The actions listed below can help your campuses deal with this incident. More detailed information and communication resources are available at www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/institutions/toolkit.

Strategies to decrease the spread of flu

1) Students, faculty, and staff with flu-like illness

- Those who are ill should not attend classes and should limit interactions with others for a period of at least 24 hours after their fever resolves without the use of fever reducing medications (e.g., acetaminophen or ibuprofen).
  - Absenteeism policies will need to be evaluated so ill students and staff are not penalized for adherence to this recommendation.
- If close contact cannot be avoided, ill students should be asked to wear a surgical mask.
  - Supplies of masks can be maintained by students or provided at central locations such as Residence Advisor locations.
- Students could be asked to establish a “flu buddy scheme” in which students pair up as the identified caregiver if one or the other becomes ill. In situations where there are no “buddies”, Residence Advisors or other volunteers, such as fraternities and sororities, student service groups, etc, can be organized to provide these services.
- Cohorting ill students in alternative settings can be considered if available and maintainable.

2) Everyone on campus should practice good respiratory etiquette (cover cough with tissue and discard tissue in trash) and hand hygiene (frequent handwashing with soap and water or use of alcohol-based gels).

Communications

1) Information, advice, policies and procedures need to be communicated simply, widely and often.
  - Communication options could include any of the following: e-mail to students, faculty and parents; scrolling marquees on electronic announcement boards; articles in student newspapers; announcements on student radio stations; podcasts; instant messaging; and social networking sites.

2) Coordination with local health departments and other local partners provides is essential to provide information and determine appropriate strategies.
  - Access to periodic formal communication with state agencies is available for college and university partners; information is available through your local health department.

Recommendations for Student Health Service Providers

1) Antiviral medications should not be used for prevention of illness among healthy students or staff with known or suspected exposures to influenza. Use of antiviral medications for post-exposure chemoprophylaxis should be reserved for persons at higher risk for influenza-related complications. Emphasis on early treatment is an alternative to post-exposure chemoprophylaxis and might reduce opportunities for development of oseltamivir resistance.

2) Medical directors should ensure that all clinicians review recommendations available at www.ncpublichealth.com. Consider assigning a student health services staff member to review that website for updates on a regular basis (e.g., weekly).
3) Treatment with antiviral medications is recommended for patients who are hospitalized or at higher risk for influenza complications. Healthy patients with uncomplicated illness need not be treated with antivirals, and such treatment is not recommended by the CDC or WHO. Antiviral treatment does not eliminate viral shedding.

4) Pandemic vaccine, when available, is recommended for persons 6 months and under 24 years of age and certain other groups.

5) Seasonal influenza vaccine is available now and should not be deferred while awaiting pandemic vaccine.

Guidance for colleges and universities might change as the situation evolves. Current information is available at the following sites:

www.pandemicflu.gov
www.ncpublichealth.com