

Students need to pack flu kit for return to campus

August 20 2009, By Tara Malone

The hot back-to-school item for college students? A thermometer. And a plan to go home or hunker down in a dorm room if the swine flu strikes.

Some colleges are recommending that students come to campus prepared for what could be a rocky fall [flu season](#). Several administrators caution that students should bring such things as medicines, tissues and hand sanitizer so they can remain cloistered in their dorm rooms if they come down with the emergent virus.

The University of Illinois even suggested students pre-plan how they'll get home if they get sick, and urged faculty members to rethink their absence policies and consider distance-learning options.

"Everyone should have a plan in the event they become ill," Dr. Robert Palinkas, director of the Urbana-Champaign campus health center, wrote in a letter to students last week.

Because college students and young people are among the most susceptible to the HINI [flu strain](#), university officials are taking a hard line to prevent the illness from spreading through dorm rooms and lecture halls. Public health experts caution that the combination of the new virus and the seasonal flu that hits each fall could disrupt classes at all levels of schooling.

In new guidance detailed this month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said people who have confirmed cases should isolate

themselves for 24 hours after the fever breaks. This revises earlier advice that infected people stay home for seven days from the illness' onset or for a day after the fever breaks, whichever was longer. Federal officials are not recommending that entire campuses shut down with an outbreak, but have urged college officials to work with local health departments.

To prepare, colleges are urging professors to prepare online lessons and adjust attendance policies for infected students who might miss class.

Like grade-school students, their [college](#) counterparts will be reminded to wash their hands often, cover their coughs and contact a physician if they display flu-like symptoms.

Loyola University Chicago -- where a [student](#) was diagnosed with H1N1 last spring -- plans to launch a Twitter page and blog this week specifically for swine flu updates, a spokeswoman said. Roosevelt University installed hand-washing stations near every elevator bank and building entrance of the Chicago and Schaumburg campuses last spring, when the HINI virus first emerged, said Bob Fitzpatrick, assistant vice president of campus safety and transportation. And Aurora University will outfit common gathering spots like the library or computer labs with hand sanitizers at its west suburban campus.

"This is a situation we're all monitoring," said Barbara Wilcox, vice president for university communications. "It's a precautionary measure for not only the [swine flu](#), but for other things as well."

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