

Date: 28 August 2009

Attention: Off-Campus Study Students

Subject: H1N1 Influenza (Swine Flu) and H1N5 (Avian Flu)

You may be wondering how the H1N1 influenza (swine flu) may impact your off-campus studies. As you are probably aware, the H1N1 influenza originated in Mexico and spread around the world in spring 2009. This strain of influenza virus is unique because it is a combination of genes from swine, bird, and human influenza viruses. Infected individuals report flu-like symptoms of high fever, aches and pains, sore throats, coughing and trouble breathing. In order to help you stay informed about H1N1flu and Avian Flu and take appropriate precautions, please read the following information regardless of your study abroad destination. While the situation is serious, we also do not want to unduly alarm you, as the number of confirmed infections worldwide is very small. But it is important to understand the H1N1 virus and how you can reduce the risk of infection.

Cases of swine flu have been reported in many countries around the world including locations in North America, Europe, Africa, Asia and South America. World health authorities are monitoring the situation closely and are particularly concerned about rapid human-to-human transmission of this virus and the virulence of this strain. There is some concern about a possible second-wave of infections occurring in the fall season similar to what occurred during the Spanish influenza pandemic in 1918.

Influenza is typically spread between humans through droplets in the air from sneezing, coughing, etc.

Here are some tips that we hope will help you reduce risk and stress while you are off campus:

BASIC PRECAUTIONS

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Take antibacterial hand sanitizing lotion (at least 60% alcohol) and N95 masks with you. N95 masks can usually be found at drug stores and Home Depot.
- Wash your hands carefully and frequently with soap and warm water. Carry the antibacterial hand sanitizing lotion and medical masks with you, if available, to use in the event that there is an outbreak of swine flu in your host country. While a wearing a surgical mask is not a fool-proof barrier to infection, it can help reduce the spread of the virus when someone already sick with the flu wears it.

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw the tissue in the trash after use. Use the crook of your elbow when you cough or sneeze if you do not have a tissue.
- Consider practicing social distancing (keeping a distance of 4-5 feet from others) and avoiding large congregations of people if there is an outbreak in your area.
- Please note that hygiene precautions for Avian/Bird Flu (H1N5) are similar to those for H1N1. To reduce risk of contracting H1N5, we recommend students also avoid poultry farms, handling raw poultry and eating any undercooked poultry products.

TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

- Keep in close contact with your program staff regarding personal travel within the region where you are studying and travel back to the US if there is an outbreak. It may be prudent to eliminate non-essential travel if the number of cases of influenza rises again.
- Some airports are screening passengers for fever and other flu symptoms, so you should anticipate possible delays. Arrive for your flights early or check with your airlines prior to departure about appropriate airport arrival times.
- In the case of a serious outbreak, some countries may impose hospital or in-home quarantines on those who exhibit flu-like symptoms. Or there may be quarantines placed on international visitors based on the country you have come from or even based on the symptoms of individuals who sat near you on the plane. In the unlikely event that you are quarantined, you should contact your program staff, the US Embassy and the Whitman OCS Office as soon as you can to inform them of your situation.
- Some countries may also limit air travel in or out of their country during serious outbreaks.

KEY WEBSITES

Stay informed about H1N1 and H1N5 by checking the CDC website periodically at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel> and the WHO website at <http://www.who.int/en>.

For specific recommendations about travel in affected areas, please see the following sections of the CDC webpage:

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/content/SwineFluMexico.aspx>

http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/?s_cid=swineFlu_outbreak_001.

For details about the symptoms to watch for, please see the link below. If you exhibit symptoms, please seek proper medical attention immediately and inform your program staff:

<http://www.paper-clip.com/Media/Sites-AdministratorsSiteNavigation/swinefluHEstudent%20guide.pdf>

Please check the Whitman homepage for updates and information or refer to the following links:

<http://www.whitman.edu/content/emergency/pandemic/2009swineflu>

<http://www.whitman.edu/content/emergency/pandemic>.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Whitman Off-Campus Studies Office staff, if you have any questions. And safe travels during your studies away!

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