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EIU, Lake Land officials aim to prevent possible H1N1 flu outbreak

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CHARLESTON - Approximately 10-12 Eastern Illinois University students have exhibited mild symptoms of a strain of influenza that is likely the new H1N1 **flu** virus now that the fall semester has begun, reported the **EIU** Health Service.

Sheila Baker, medical director for health service, said **EIU** leaders are encouraging students who have these mild **flu** symptoms, such as fever or nausea, to take precautions like staying home until they are fever free for 24 hours without medication. The H1N1 virus also is known as the swine **flu**.

Baker said **EIU** also is taking the preventive step of promoting stepped-up hand sanitizing on campus. "We have found that hand washing is effective at preventing the spread of this particular type of virus," said Baker, noting the hand sanitizing stations that have been placed at entrances to campus buildings and offices.

In Mattoon, Lake Land College officials had some worries when a student complained of **flu** symptoms. Tests quickly confirmed the illness was not caused by H1N1, said Tina Stovall, LLC vice president of student services.

That was a relief to the college community, but Lake Land leaders are not letting their guard down this semester with health experts urging a battery of precautions against outbreaks of this **flu** strain that is potentially deadly in worst cases.

Vaccinations for students and employees will be given in October in cooperation with the county health department, Stovall said. But starting on Tuesday, the college will initiate **flu** awareness training to help prevent the spread of the virus on campus.

These training sessions will include college employees and students. There will also be a special emphasis on one segment of the Lake Land student population, Stovall said.

"We do have concerns with the athletes because they face a risk as they work out together," Stovall said.

If students test positive for H1N1 **flu**, the campus does have an emergency response plan in place to control the outbreak as much as possible, Stovall said.

EIU has been offering free seasonal **flu** shots for students since the beginning of September. Baker said H1N1 is a different strain of the **flu**, so a specific H1N1 vaccine is needed. She said these vaccinations should be available to students by at least mid-October.

Baker said people ages 6 months to 24 years are considered at high risk for H1N1, so vaccinations are important for students.

Stovall said all the precautions are based on information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These include emphasis on covering the nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing and properly washing hands regularly to prevent the spread of the viral germs.

Both the Lake Land's Web site, www.lakeland.cc.il.us, and **EIU's** site, www.eiu.edu, include direct links to CDC information.

"We want people to stay informed," said Baker, adding **EIU** officials have been distributing **flu** safety tips and hand sanitizing kits to students.

Another precaution depends on individual judgment: staying at home when sick with **flu**-like symptoms.

"They should stay at home if they think they have the **flu** and for 24 hours after the fever breaks. Some people don't want to miss work or class. But we're asking them not to push it as much with this **flu**," Stovall said.

Baker said **EIU** recommends that students with the **flu** go back to their hometowns, if possible, via private transportation until their fevers pass. She said students who cannot do this should stay in their campus or private residences and limit their exposure to other people until they are better.

EIU's housing service has been finding alternate temporary rooms for on-campus students who have the **flu** or their roommates, Baker said.

Mild cases of the **flu** can be treated with over-the-counter medications, plenty of liquids and lots of rest, Baker noted. She said those who experience worsening symptoms should seek medical attention.

EIU's "H1N1 Survival Guide," based on CDC tips, states that most people who have had the disease have only had mild symptoms and recover without needing medication.

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