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H1N1 has college students in its crosshairs for now

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CHARLESTON - The H1N1 virus has placed a target on the backs of students at Eastern Illinois University and colleges around the world, a human diseases expert said Tuesday night.

Normally, **flu** strains strike children and the elderly hardest, but this H1N1 strain, commonly referred to as swine **flu**, is more of a risk to young adults.

"You happen to be the target population, people under 24, for this virus. That is a characteristic of this virus," said Sheila Simons of Eastern Health Services and an expert on epidemiology and human diseases, during her lecture called "H1N1: Facts Versus Fears." The lecture, co-sponsored by University Professionals of Illinois Chapter Eastern Illinois Chapter, drew about 30 students and faculty members to Lumpkin Hall Tuesday night.

EIU Health Services data shows 50 Eastern students have been confirmed with **flu** infections which includes the H1N1 strain as well as the seasonal **flu**, which is a small number of the 13,434 H1N1 cases confirmed nationwide as of Sept. 11. Some Eastern students have required hospitalization.

With H1N1 vaccine not widely available for several weeks in the United States, Simons urged the audience to follow the three C's: Clean, Cover and Contain.

Constant cleaning of hands and contact surfaces, ranging from computer keyboards, phone receivers and door knobs, is a must with any **flu** virus, Simons said.

Carrying tissues for capturing airborne droplets from sneezes and coughing protects friends, co-workers and people you approach in the public, she said. Or cough and sneeze in your elbow if you don't have a tissue or cloth. She said masks can be ineffective if they become moist.

"A sneeze travels at 100 mph and it spreads everywhere. So cover up," she said.

Recognize the symptoms of the **flu** as opposed to a cold to gain proper treatment. Major symptoms for a **flu** include a high fever of 100 degrees or more, nausea and vomiting, exhaustion and muscle aches, dry coughs, severe headaches, loss of appetite and chest discomfort. A cold might involve only a moderate fever, sore throat, slight hacking but a normal appetite.

Definitely stay home when **flu** symptoms are present, Simons said.

Simons urged students to seek medical care through the university health service if the conditions worsen. Those with **flu** symptoms should not return to class or work until the fever has ended for a couple of days. A typical recovery might take seven days, but it might vary with each person, especially those with additional health problems, Simons said.

Simons tried to emphasize the importance of following precautions to contain the disease. Ninety years ago, the world was struck hard by the Spanish **Flu**, which killed up to 100 million people worldwide. In the United States, the Great Influenza claimed 550,000 lives. The World Health Organization has declared H1N1 a pandemic with infections reported in most countries and all continents.

Simons and other health experts don't want history to repeat itself.

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