

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **NIC prepares for possible spread of flu this fall**

Summers in higher education are often spent looking to the year ahead. And while North Idaho College officials were planning for the start of fall semester, they were also preparing for the upcoming flu season and a possible reemergence of H1N1 Influenza.

“We’re planning for the upcoming flu season a little more proactively than usual,” said NIC Dean of Students and Student Health Services Director Linda Michal, who attended an H1N1 Influenza Summit hosted by the Panhandle Health District Aug. 19. Dozens of agencies from across the region also attended the summit, ranging from elected officials to physicians to educators. “The safety of our students, employees and community members that we come into contact with on a daily basis is of the utmost importance to us.”

The Center for Disease Control has provided recommendations to all higher education institutions on specific steps to take this flu season. Michal said NIC also maintains a close working relationship with the Panhandle Health District to share information of potential communicable disease epidemics in the region.

NIC officials have already begun communications with students, staff and faculty on campus, encouraging preventative measures such as hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes.

Additionally with contingency funds, the college has purchased hand sanitizer dispensers for all of the classrooms on campus and sanitizing wipes and small bottles of hand sanitizer will be distributed to all college offices this week.

The Center for Disease Control recommends that those who are sick isolate themselves and stay home at least 24 hours after the fever and fever symptoms subside, which presents unique challenges for colleges and universities. Because NIC’s student attendance policy varies by instructor, the Office of Instruction is working with all faculty members, encouraging them to be flexible with student attendance this year if the flu becomes prevalent on campus.

The same applies to employee managers, who have been encouraged by NIC’s Human Resources Office to ensure that sick employees stay home until they are well.

“To limit the spread of the flu, it’s crucial to stay home when you are sick,” said NIC Human Resources Director Wade Larson. “We’re making sure that all managers encourage sick employees to not come to work, to protect the wellbeing of all of our campus community.”

NIC’s department of eLearning and Outreach is encouraging instructors to look at creative ways to offer courses if illness affects a large percentage of students in class or the instructors themselves. Every section of every course NIC offers has the potential to place instructional content online, according to NIC eLearning and Outreach Director Jamie Green. And a variety of other methods of course delivery are available as well, including real-time delivery via interactive video conferencing, web-based virtual classrooms and placing recorded lectures online.

Student health staff will monitor attendance in classes and campus offices this fall and will make recommendations to the college president and board of trustees on cancelations of classes, athletics travel and events if the outbreak were to become severe.

“We’re not trying to be alarmists, and really, it would have to be extreme for it to come to this,” Michal said. “But we want to ensure that we’re prepared for the worst case scenario because we really don’t know what to expect.”

As is done every year, Student Health Services will oversee flu vaccination clinics for students and employees in October. The H1N1 Influenza vaccine is not available yet, but plans are to offer the vaccine to those at the highest risk for flu complications, which include pregnant women, household and caregiver contacts for children younger than 6 months, healthcare and emergency services providers, children 6 months to 4 years old and children 5 to 18 years old with chronic medical conditions.

The NIC Children’s Center and the NIC Residence Hall are developing plans for how their organizations will educate residents and parents of children in the center about flu prevention as well as planning for a potential outbreak.

Students or parents with questions may call the NIC Student Health Services Office at (208) 769-7818 or for information on illness prevention, symptoms and what to do if you become sick visit [www.nic.edu/h1n1](http://www.nic.edu/h1n1).