Texas A&M University’s H1N1 Response

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First suspected case of H1N1 appeared on campus in early June 2009.

Student Health Services saw a peak in flu-like illnesses during September 2009. Approx. 99% were suspected cases of H1N1.

Corps of Cadets was one of the hardest hit areas with approx. 120 of 1870 cadets having flu-like symptoms.

To date, there have been no reports of classes being cancelled or operations being significantly impacted from flu cases.
H1N1 Flu Operations Planning Team

• Established in April 2009.
• Consists of representatives from System Headquarters, TAMUG, and across the University.
• Monitor the outbreak of the H1N1 flu and respond in accordance with guidance from Centers for Disease Control, Texas Department of State Health Services, and Brazos County Health Department.
• Broadened to influenza-like illness.
• During April/May 2009, team met almost daily to discuss current events, the impact on the University, and how to respond.
• Team met biweekly during the Fall 2009.
H1N1 Flu Operations Planning Team

- Monitored the statewide conference calls with the Governor’s Division of Emergency Management, the Texas Department of State Health Services, and others.
- Provided updates to executive management.
- Coordinated University’s response to suspected H1N1 flu in colleges/departments.
- Researched what other universities were doing in response to the H1N1 flu threat (i.e., hand shaking at graduation, etc.)
- Presented information on H1N1 flu to groups and organizations on campus.
- Communicated with departmental safety committees regarding social distancing issues, hand sanitization, etc.
• Created a checklist to ensure all activities (e.g., classes, athletic events, OPAS events, etc.) are addressed in the event of a significant resurgence of flu.
• Coordinated University’s actions with those of Brazos County, Bryan, and College Station.
• Reviewed the Institutional Pandemic Influenza Response Plan and coordinated with departments that have “essential functions” under the plan.
• Asked colleges/departments for their help in reducing the spread of the flu as well as developing contingency plans in the event of a significant resurgence of flu.
• Encourage immunizations (seasonal and H1N1).
• Promote good hygienic practices by making soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand cleaners, tissues, and no-touch wastebaskets readily available.
• Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces could be wiped down (i.e., chairs, keyboards, phones, etc.)
• Use posters, flyers, letters, emails, etc. from the CDC toolkit to educate employees and students about flu prevention.
• Advise sick faculty, staff, students to stay home until 24 hours fever free (without fever-reducing medications).
• Send home those who come to work/class sick and could infect others.
How Colleges/Departments Were Asked to Help

- Monitor and report absences.
- Notify Custodial Services of flu outbreaks so additional cleaning procedures could be implemented.
- Review and update department contingency plans.
- Encourage employees and students to update their contact information.
- Communicate with vendors who supply critical products and services to ensure continuation if flu conditions became more severe.
- Review critical processes necessary for the continuity of operations in the event of a University closure.
- Identify essential personnel.
How Colleges/Departments Were Asked to Help

• Develop a plan for how classes could be continued if classes were suspended (i.e., webconferencing, etc.)
• For those departments that expected to telecommute, survey employees to determine who had the capability to work from home. Review whether users knew how to access the systems from home, have the correct software installed, have proper training, etc.
• Consider alternate means of communication such as audioconferencing, webconferencing, etc.
• Created a Texas A&M influenza information website. During the height of concern, a link to the website was established on the Texas A&M University homepage.
• Kept the campus community (including parents) up-to-date on the H1N1 influenza virus through the TAMU website, periodic emails, and Aggie Hotline articles.
• Communicated flu prevention tips including encouraging flu shots among faculty, staff, and students.
• Notified degree candidates to bring their own hand sanitizers to graduation, what to do if sick, etc.
• Streamed graduation for those who could not attend.
Physical Plant/Custodial Services

- Developed a pandemic cleaning protocol and trained all custodial staff.
- Expanded cleaning procedures to include door knobs, door handles, elevator buttons, and other frequently touched surfaces.
- Posted “Stop the Spread of Flu” flyers in campus restrooms.
- Placed hand sanitizer stations in most campus buildings.
- Placed hand sanitizers for graduates to use as they approached and left the commencement stage.
- Held an on-campus flu shot clinic for TAMU employees and their families (seasonal flu only).
• Monitored daily flu testing and results performed at the Student Health Center.
• Put protective measures in place (e.g., masks and hand sanitizers) in the triage area of the Student Health Center.
• Registered as a healthcare provider to receive the H1N1 vaccine. First doses of H1N1 vaccine were received in December 2009.
• Ordered approx. 2,750 courses of Tamiflu.
• Held an on-campus flu shot clinic (seasonal flu only). First 5,000 vaccines to students were free.
• Allowed ill students to arrange for a friend to pick up food at a dining center.
• Identified housing accommodations for ill students living in on-campus residence halls, in the event that self-isolation was not possible, and/or a student could not return home.
• Requested student organization advisors and leaders to weigh the benefits and risks for mass gatherings.
• Informed the coordinators of new student conferences and camps regarding suspected cases of H1N1 on campus.
• Notified parents of children enrolled in the Children’s Center of a suspected case of H1N1 flu.
Encouraged supervisors, managers, and faculty members to accept documentation other than a physician’s statement of illness.

Reviewed leave policies including alternate work location, emergency leave, leave without pay, etc. and formalized a recommendation for the President’s approval.

Developed FAQs regarding employee absences relating to H1N1.
Developed a website containing Work from Home Resources.
• Planned for contingencies related to the modification and/or elimination of Athletic related events.
Lessons Learned

• Improve communication – not only within the University, but communication with System offices, agencies, local schools, cities, etc.
• Request an emergency fund to purchase items in the event of an emergency and/or stockpile supplies.
• Develop alternative leave policies beforehand.
• Have messages come directly from the President.
• Ensure that when directives are published, there is either a follow-up communication or an expiration date on the original directive.
• Ensure that departments have a continuity plan that addresses items such as: essential personnel, who can work from home, audio conferencing capabilities, etc.
• Expand representation of the team – i.e., add representatives from other campus agencies, etc.
• Get the webpage up faster; approval process needs to be faster.
Current Situation

• H1N1 flu cases are still appearing on campus but on a smaller scale (e.g., two confirmed cases of H1N1 in the last month).
• Team continues to monitor the severity of the H1N1 influenza virus.
• Flu webpages continue to be updated with the latest information/developments.
• Several hundred H1N1 vaccine doses still available for students.
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