

**Prepared Statement of Michael Kurland  
Director, Student Health Services  
University of Connecticut  
September 21, 2009**

## **University of Connecticut Preparations for H1N1 Outbreak**

The University of Connecticut has a pandemic flu/continuity of operations committee which follows an operational plan based upon the NIMS model. This committee is comprised of representatives from a number of departments throughout the university, including Student Affairs, Student Health Services, Facilities, Academic Affairs, Public Safety, Environmental Health and Safety, Human Resources, the Office of the Attorney General, the Office of Communications, Finance, Regional Campuses and experts in emergency preparedness from Continuing Studies. The committee has been meeting for the past several months in order to plan for all aspects of health, safety and continuity of operations in the event of an H1N1 flu outbreak. The committee is chaired by Major Ron Blicher who serves as incident commander and in my capacity as Director of Student Health Services, I serve as the operations section chief.

Additionally, the Division of Student Affairs maintains an H1N1 Task Force which has been meeting weekly in order to operationalize plans for the health and safety of students and staff. This task force is comprised of representatives from Student Affairs, Student Health Services, Residential Life, Dining Services, The Office of Student Services and Advocacy, and Wellness and Prevention Services. Meetings have included staff from Environmental Health and Safety.

The issues addressed have included, but are not limited to the following:

- **Prevention strategies/Community education-** the university is embarking upon a multi-faceted health communications campaign in order to help prevent the transmission of the H1N1 virus. The focus is on respiratory etiquette, social distancing, proper hand washing, staying healthy, proper cleaning of personal and work space and encouraging students and staff to self isolate if they are infected with the flu. The methods of dissemination of information include bulletin boards, pamphlets, table tents, curriculum infusion, mass emails, letters, use of a dedicated H1N1 website, training of staff, cable TV and radio P.S.A.'s. The website includes many helpful links as well as FAQ pages for both employees and students. Additionally, students have been encouraged to be prepared and purchase supplies of hand sanitizer, fever reducing medications, fever thermometers and surgical face masks. Hand sanitizer has been made readily available in many public areas of the university and has been disseminated to students by many departments.
- **Isolation and support services-** the key to preventing transmission is to encourage isolation of sick people. Students who are ill are encouraged to call an Advice Nurse to seek medical assistance for the flu. They are provided with an assessment via the phone and are requested to visit the Student Health Service only if medically indicated in order to avoid burdening the healthcare system and reducing potential virus transmission. They are encouraged to remain isolated if they do not share a bedroom with another student. If they share a bedroom with another student, they are asked to return home if their family lives within driving distance.

Fortunately 85-90% of UCONN students live within driving distance of campus. If it is unfeasible to return home, the university has designated a number of beds to provide isolation for these individuals. Students who are self isolating or who have been moved to an isolation area are provided with meals delivered from Dining Services and are provided with a limited supply of “flu kits” and supplies such as Tylenol, Advil, fever thermometers and surgical face masks. If medically indicated, they will be admitted into the infirmary unit (inpatient) of the Student Health Service facility.

- **Academic considerations-** in order to reduce the transmission of H1N1, students are advised to be absent from classes if they have the flu. Professors have been advised to not require medical excuse notes and to expect higher than normal rates of absenteeism. Additionally, professors have been encouraged to utilize web based course tools which can assist students in keeping up with the curriculum in the event of illness.
- **Vaccination-** students are encouraged to receive both the seasonal flu vaccine as well as the H1N1 vaccine. Seasonal flu vaccine clinics have been scheduled earlier than usual. H1N1 vaccination clinics will be scheduled as soon as the vaccine is available. Doses of H1N1 vaccine have already been requested and will be provided free of charge to all students who fall within the target groups defined by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).
- **Coordination with outside resources-** the university has been in close contact with the Connecticut Department of Public Health and has coordinated with the Eastern Highlands Health District, which is the health department for the local 10 town area.

**Current status:** As of this week the University of Connecticut has had 1 confirmed case of H1N1, 2 probable cases of H1N1 and less than 20 cases of influenza like illness (I.L.I.). We are monitoring the situation closely.

#### **Challenges:**

- Maintaining an ample number of isolation beds as the university residence halls are at 100% occupancy
- Maintaining “continuity of operations” in the event of large numbers of employee absences
- Maintaining an adequate amount of supplies to care for those sick with the flu
- Deciding when to cancel public events/classes due to large number of cases of the flu
- Staffing H1N1 vaccination clinics for an unprecedented number of inoculations
- Cost of supplies and personnel to accommodate the outbreak.