

Wheaton College Student Health Services

Roommate FAQs about Flu

Here are answers to common questions Student Health Services receives from roommates of students who have been diagnosed with an Influenza-Like Illness (ILI):

What is Influenza-Like-Illness?

Influenza-like illness is the name for a group of influenza viruses with similar symptoms that are similarly treated, including seasonal flu and the H1N1 virus (sometimes called “swine flu”).

What are the symptoms of ILI?

The symptoms of ILI or flu viruses include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. Students who have health concerns such as asthma, pulmonary issues, or who have a compromised immune system or have recently been sick are at increased risk for ILI complications.

How is ILI transmitted from person to person?

Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people become infected by touching a surface or object – with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouths or noses. People generally start to experience symptoms between one and four days after they have contact with an infected contagious person.

How can I protect myself from influenza viruses?

You can:

- Wash your hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer regularly. A hand sanitizer must have an alcohol content of 60 percent or greater to be effective.
- Frequently clean surfaces that might become contaminated, and use wipes that kill the virus. Students who are diagnosed with ILI are given a simple 10 percent bleach solution to use, and bleach wipes are also useful. This is important because the influenza virus can survive on surfaces, and it can infect a person for 2-8 hours after being deposited on a surface.
- Get vaccinated. The seasonal flu vaccine is available at SHS.
- Take good care of yourself by eating well, exercising, and getting enough rest.
- If your roommate gets sick with ILI, use the bleach solution to clean surfaces, continue to use respiratory etiquette, and practice “distancing”-- try to stay 3-6 feet away from your roommate. These practices reduce your chances of catching the virus.
- If you start to experience symptoms, go to SHS for an assessment.

What instructions has my roommate received from SHS?

To protect others from contracting the ILI, your roommate is on “soft isolation,” meaning that he or she has been asked not to go to classes, to Anderson Commons, or to other

public gatherings until 24 hours after symptoms and fevers cease without the use of fever-reducing medications.

Your roommate also has a mask to wear for times when contact with the public is unavoidable, and to protect you. An SHS nurse calls students with ILIs every 24 hours to assess their progress.

What should I do to help a roommate who has ILI?

SHS has provided meal tickets to your roommate, and you can help by making sure that you, or another friend, are available to deliver meals. Ask your RA for help if you are unavailable to make these arrangements.

Can I be moved into another room?

Residence Life is not changing student rooms, because moving students who have already been exposed to the virus would likely expose unaffected students in the new setting. Student Health Services advises that you carefully monitor yourself for symptoms and come to SHS if you start to feel ill. Like other colleges, SHS follows guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and also the American College Health Association regarding housing issues.

When should I be concerned about a change in my roommate's condition?

You or your roommate should contact SHS immediately if your roommate experiences difficulty breathing or shortness of breath; pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen; sudden dizziness; confusion; severe or persistent vomiting; or if flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough.