

## COMMUNICABLE DISEASE GUIDE

Version	Date	Comments
1	June, 2009	Initial <i>Communicable Disease Guide</i>
2	March, 2012	Routine review
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### A. INTRODUCTION

This Guide is designed to promote the health and safety of university employees and students by providing information that can be used to prevent the contraction and spread of communicable diseases and the appropriate response to a communicable disease outbreak.

The Environmental Health and Safety Office (EHS) in conjunction with Human Resources and Payroll, Student Health Services (SHS), and University Communications and Marketing will alert the campus community when there is a communicable disease threat affecting members of campus community such as a pandemic influenza or norovirus outbreak. The guidance provided in Section F. “Respond” should be followed whenever a communicable disease or public health emergency is declared.

University communicable disease prevention, mitigation, and response activities are guided by the University *Communicable Disease Plan*. In the event of an emergency, George Mason University will notify the university community of the emergency, take actions to protect the health and safety of students, faculty, staff, and visitors, and provide additional guidance if necessary.

### B. SCOPE

Communicable diseases falling within the scope of this Guide are those typically caused by bacteria, viruses, fungi, or parasites and normally spread through direct or indirect human contact or through the consumption of contaminated food/water. Examples of communicable diseases include but are not limited to:

- Hepatitis A
- Norovirus
- Influenza
- Measles
- Meningococcal Meningitis
- Mumps
- Rubella
- Tuberculosis

## C. PREVENT

Vaccines, antibiotics, antivirals, innate immunity, and/or acquired immunity can provide some protection against certain communicable diseases. Not all communicable diseases are treatable, nor are current treatments guaranteed to protect against a communicable disease. Therefore, it is important to limit the spread of a communicable disease before it has the potential to cause serious illness/disease by taking the following steps:

- Wash your hands frequently.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces.
- Practice a healthy lifestyle; exercise, eat a balanced diet, and get sufficient sleep.
- Handle and prepare food safely: keep foods at correct temperature, cook foods (especially meats) thoroughly, wash produce, and observe expiration dates.
- Follow universal precautions<sup>1</sup> when working with bloodborne pathogens.
- Avoid public places, work, or school when sick to prevent the spread of a communicable disease.
- Maintain appropriate immunizations and vaccinations based upon the region in which you live and work, and your exposure risk.
  - Incoming students must complete all required immunizations:  
[shs.gmu.edu/immunizations/index.php#Completion](http://shs.gmu.edu/immunizations/index.php#Completion)
  - University employees are eligible to receive select vaccinations free of charge if they are determined by EHS to work in positions where there is a potential for exposure to infectious materials. Please refer to the *Medical Surveillance Program* or contact EHS for additional information.  
[ehs.gmu.edu/docs/MedicalSurveillanceProgram.pdf](http://ehs.gmu.edu/docs/MedicalSurveillanceProgram.pdf)
  - SHS provides immunizations and vaccinations to the university community at minimal cost.
  - All university employees enrolled in Mason's health benefits program have access to free wellness benefits including free influenza shots.

Faculty and staff should familiarize themselves with health benefits available through their Mason benefits plan. Please visit the Human Resources and Payroll website for more complete information: <http://hr.gmu.edu/>

## D. IDENTIFY

Recognizing the signs and symptoms of a communicable disease and understanding the modes of transmission is the first step in reducing the incidence of disease associated with communicable diseases. Signs and symptoms will vary depending on the disease, but common characteristics associated at the onset of most communicable diseases typically include fever and other flu-like symptoms; achiness, upset stomach, fatigue, fever, and headaches. When traveling abroad, be aware of communicable disease threats; certain communicable diseases are endemic to certain regions of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information see the Bloodborne Pathogens Program: [ehs.gmu.edu](http://ehs.gmu.edu)

## **E. PLAN**

It is important to have a plan in place within your unit or department to respond to staffing and other business issues that may arise during a communicable disease emergency or whenever employees are unable to attend work due to illness. A unit plan should address:

- Designate employees who will work during a communicable disease emergency either onsite or at an alternate location (including home).
- Cross train staff to provide at least three levels of backup for critical positions.
- Develop telework agreements with those staff who may have to work from home or an alternate location. Establish virtual private networks, soft phones, or other solutions to support telework. Information can be found at [flexwork.gmu.edu](http://flexwork.gmu.edu).
- Create a working group to discuss other potential department-specific issues that may arise during an emergency and prepare for them (e.g. impact of a communicable disease on a conference or other planned event, the potential need for ad-hoc telework (for those whose symptoms have subsided and may want to begin working again but cannot return to the workplace as yet).

## **F. RESPOND**

The following procedures should be followed whenever a communicable disease emergency such as a regional communicable disease outbreak, pandemic, or public health emergency is declared by federal, state, or local health officials, or university officials. For all other routine, seasonal, or individual health issues, consult your healthcare provider. Routine, seasonal, and individual health issues DO NOT need to be reported to university officials unless advised to do so by your healthcare provider.

### **Employees:**

Faculty or staff who are diagnosed with or believe they have a communicable disease should:

- Seek medical attention if necessary.
- Inform the appropriate Human Resources Benefits Administrator (703) 993-2600 of your condition or diagnosis and relay pertinent information provided by your health care provider.
- Stay at home when sick and avoid close contact with others to the extent possible.
  - Do not return to work until advised to do so by a health care professional or, in the absence of medical consultation, do not return to work for the duration of the illness and 24-hours after symptoms abate;
  - Notify your supervisor; and
  - Record your time away from work as sick leave.
- To limit the spread of a communicable disease, avoid traveling when sick, unless otherwise deemed appropriate by a health care professional.
- Use antibiotics and antivirals appropriately and exactly as prescribed for the full duration of the prescription – do not self-medicate or share medications with others.

- Maintain awareness of the situation and the progression and nature of the communicable disease emergency by monitoring media outlets.
- Faculty: Arrange alternate teaching schedules to avoid cancellation of class when possible.

### **Supervisors:**

Supervisors who become aware of an employee under their supervision who exhibits communicable disease symptoms or is diagnosed with a communicable disease must not release the employee's name, identifying information, or condition to other employees. All employee healthcare concerns must be forwarded to the appropriate Human Resources & Payroll Benefits Administrator (703) 993-2600. Supervisors and employees can contact Human Resources & Payroll with any questions or concerns they may have regarding workplace issues surrounding communicable disease.

Please note: In the event that the Commonwealth declares a communicable disease to be a public health threat or public health emergency, the DHRM Public Health Emergency Leave Policy may be partially or fully implemented [http://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/hrpolicy/web/Pol4\\_52.pdf](http://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/hrpolicy/web/Pol4_52.pdf).

### **Students:**

A student who is diagnosed with or believes he/she has a communicable disease should:

- Seek medical attention at Student Health Services: [shs.gmu.edu/](http://shs.gmu.edu/) or primary care provider.
- If you become sick and are unable to visit SHS contact SHS and provide them with information regarding your condition, symptoms, and location (703) 993-2831.
- Stay at home or within your residence hall when sick and avoid close contact with others to the extent possible.
  - Do not return to class or work until advised to do so by a health care professional or for the duration of the illness and 24-hours after symptoms abate.
  - Notify your professors, instructors, supervisor, and family as necessary.
- To limit the spread of a communicable disease, avoid traveling when sick, unless otherwise deemed appropriate by a health care professional.
- Use antibiotics and antivirals appropriately and exactly as prescribed for the full duration of the prescription – do not self-medicate or share medications with others.
- Maintain awareness of the situation and the progression and nature of the communicable disease emergency by monitoring media outlets.

### **Returning to Work/School:**

Prior to returning to work or school, students and employees should take precautions to prevent spreading a communicable disease by ensuring that symptoms have passed. Remain at home if contagious, and, if necessary, consult a health care professional for guidance or clearance to return to work or school prior to returning to the university. During a university wide

communicable disease outbreak, a written statement indicating that students or employees may return to work or school from an attending physician or primary care provider may be required before returning to the university.

### **Confidentiality:**

All student and employee medical information is treated as private and confidential and will be handled in compliance with legal requirements and professional ethical standards.

- The university will implement and maintain procedural safeguards to protect the privacy interests of persons in the campus community who have a communicable disease in accordance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and all federal, state, and local regulations.
- The university will not disclose the identity of any employee or student who has a communicable disease, except as authorized or required by law, as may be necessary, on a “need to know” basis and as is consistent with the guidelines included in the American College Health Association's Recommended Standards and Practices for a College Health Program.

### **G. RESOURCES**

For additional information about a specific communicable disease including symptoms, prevention, treatment, and communicable disease outbreak, please visit the following websites:

- United States Department of Health and Human Services: [www.hhs.gov/](http://www.hhs.gov/).
- Virginia Department of Health: [www.vdh.state.va.us/](http://www.vdh.state.va.us/).
- Student Health Services: [shs.gmu.edu/](http://shs.gmu.edu/).
- Your personal health care provider(s) or physician.

Additional resources to help prevent, identify, and/or respond to communicable diseases, outbreak, travel alerts and advisories, or pandemic disease emergencies can be found at the following websites:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- CDC Traveler's Health webpage: [wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx)
- World Health Organization (WHO): [www.who.int/en/](http://www.who.int/en/)
- WHO Travel and Health webpage: [www.who.int/ith/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/ith/en/index.html)
- U.S. Pandemic Flu Website: [www.pandemicflu.gov/](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/)
- U.S. State Department Travel Alerts webpage:  
[travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis\\_pa\\_tw\\_1168.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis_pa_tw_1168.html)