

# A Rough Flu Season on Campus

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BY JANUARY W. PAYNE, *U.S. News & World Report*

**S**econd semester is in high gear, and so is flu season. College campuses, those great breeding grounds for illness, are widely reporting an unusual number of cases this year, possibly because the vaccine is a poor match to the flu viruses circulating. The University of Michigan's campus health center treated 145 cases in the first two weeks of February, compared with 11 in the same period last year. At the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, the 457 students who showed up for help between late January and mid-February represent "a higher number of cases in a shorter period of time," according to Mary Covington, assistant vice chancellor for campus health services. Flu traffic at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's health center likewise has "increased dramatically in the past three weeks," says Sarah Van Orman, director of clinical services—and two doctors and a pharmacist have been out of work sick so far this season.

window of effectiveness—within two days of onset—has closed.

Other steps students can take to protect themselves and one another:

- Defeat germs. Cover your nose or mouth when you sneeze or cough—and consider "coughing into your sleeve instead of your hand," advises Van Orman. Avoid people who are sick, and try to avoid touching your own nose, eyes, or mouth; germs are frequently spread this way.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- If you do get sick, stay home from class and work. Get lots of rest and drink plenty of liquids, and steer clear of other students. Call or see a doctor

early on to get advice on how to treat symptoms; antiviral medicines may be an option.

**How to lower the odds of getting sick? It's not too late to go in for a vaccination. "We still have some flu shots, and we have encouraged their use," says Robert Winfield, chief health officer for the University of Michigan.**

While this year's flu shot is less effective than usual, any illness should be milder and with a lower risk of complications than it might otherwise be, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Wisconsin, too, still has flu vaccine available and is encouraging students to get vaccinated. It offers the shots free and has had 7,100 takers so far since fall.

Students who start to feel symptoms coming on can lessen the pain by reporting promptly for antiviral medication. At UNC, the campus pharmacy has filled 292 prescriptions for Tamiflu so far this season, compared with 204 during the entire flu season last year. The problem, says Wisconsin's Van Orman, is that many students come to the health service after the

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