

A Message to All Staff and Students From the East Gippsland TAFE

Executive Team: H1N1 Virus Update and East Gippsland TAFE's response

5 June 2009

Background

Nearly everyone will have been besieged over the past couple of weeks with information about the H1N1 virus (Swine Flu) pandemic. Fortunately there is only one confirmed case in East Gippsland so far, but it appears as if it's only a matter of time before more people in this area are infected. As a result we need to think about how it could affect staff, students and EG TAFE's operations.

Above all, the Executive Team is focused on:

- The welfare of students, staff, clients and visitors at our campuses
- Planning and establishing priorities for allocating people and resources to any possible threat
- Making sure that critical areas of our organisation are staffed and resourced
- Maintaining a centralised control of any emergency and recovery from the emergency
- Communicating to students, staff, clients and the wider community what we are doing.

Apparent findings to date about this virus

The collective advice of a number of sources is that this virus is proving to be more contagious than an ordinary flu virus, particularly amongst younger people. Older people seem to have some level of immunity to the virus presumably due to exposure to a similar virus in the past.

The virus is also proving itself to be, in the main, a milder form of flu than ordinary flu and has now spread so widely through the Victorian community that the Government is no longer trying to contain the virus's spread by quarantine and school closures. The Government is instead focussing on protecting the more vulnerable members of the community (very much like in an ordinary flu season).

What EG TAFE is doing

Given that we now appear to be dealing with a contagious but not unusually dangerous flu (and given that any flu is dangerous to people whose health is already impaired) it is likely that some part of the Institute's operations will be impacted in coming months. This will most likely be in the form of significant numbers of staff or students away at any one time.

The Institute's Critical Incident Response Plan has been activated and a CIDE (Critical Incident Disaster and Emergency) Team has met and reviewed potential responses. Arrangements have

been made to ensure that we have backups for key processes, and our contact lists are being updated so that we are in the best possible position should we need to contact staff or students at short notice about any change as a response to the flu.

We are also purchasing a bulk amount of alcohol based hand wipes (not for mixing with coke) and a supply of mouth masks, the latter as a precautionary measure only (i.e. not for immediate distribution).

What you can do to assist in minimising the spread of H1N1 (or any other flu)

The best way for all of us to minimise the impact of this flu on ourselves, our families and friends, and on the Institute is to observe sensible hygiene measures, both to protect ourselves from catching the virus, and to protect others from ourselves should we develop the flu.

These measures are being widely communicated by the Government and include:

- We all have a role to play in looking after our health. Good hygiene is vital.
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
 - Throw the tissue in a plastic-lined rubbish bin after you use it.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as germs spread that way.

- For the most up-to-date information :
 - Visit www.health.vic.gov.au
 - Call the Influenza Hotline on 180 2007 or
 - Call Nurse-on-Call on 1300 606 024 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)

- Please:
 - Call your GP if you have a flu like illness (fever and cough and fatigue).
 - Call your local hospital ONLY if you are seriously unwell with flu like symptoms.
 - Don't attend school or work if you have flu-like symptoms unless your doctor has advised that it is appropriate to do so.

Travel

Given that H1N1 09 flu is prevalent in the Australian community, and now that the Victorian government has moved away from the policy of trying to quarantine whole groups of (otherwise healthy) people who may have come into contact with someone with the H1N1 flu, EG TAFE is

imposing no restrictions on travel by staff. Staff should continue to review the Government's travel advisories at the Smart Traveller website www.smarttraveller.gov.au/ .

Consideration has been given to requesting staff and students returning from overseas to spend a period of time (say 3-5 days at home before returning to TAFE), but we have decided that this is no longer warranted. Staff and students are just as likely to contract the flu within their local community or on a trip to Melbourne or from family members. Staff and students should of course comply with any recommendations given to them by health authorities if returning from overseas.

Communication

The key mode of communicating anything particular about the H1N1 virus and the Institute will be through Staffpoint for staff and via the Online Campus student intranet for students. Of course, students and staff are welcome to call for information at any time. If you have particular questions about our H1N1 virus response, please call Carmel McQuillen at Fulham campus on #2402.