

September 5, 2006

Dear Members of the Bridgewater State College Community:

As you know, avian influenza (subtype H5N1), also known as the “bird flu,” is a hot topic of discussion and has received considerable media attention. The World Health Organization and U.S. public health authorities are making preparations in the event a pandemic occurs and have urged all local communities to do the same.

As an institution, we are acting upon this recommendation and have, since last spring, been steadily making plans to prepare our campus community should the need arise. As we continue to develop and refine our emergency response plan, it is important to note that our work up until now has focused on three key objectives:

- Ensuring that first-responders and on-campus health care providers are prepared to respond by providing ongoing education about avian influenza, rehearsing emergency drills, and having medical supplies and equipment readily available;
- Making arrangements to ensure the continuity of critical college services in the event of a suspension of classes or closing of the campus;
- Clarifying the criteria upon which decisions to suspend classes or close would be made.

While we must take steps to prepare for a pandemic, the chances of an outbreak appear quite small. Despite the fact that millions of birds, domestic and wild, have been culled, the infection has been persistent in the bird population and continues to spread along the flight paths of migratory birds. Most of the laboratory confirmed cases in humans have resulted from direct contact with infected birds with only a few cases occurring from human-to-human contact. Scientists, public health authorities, and government officials have expressed concern that a pandemic could be sparked by the virus if it mutates in a way that allows for sustainable transmission from person to person.

We are also following the latest developments by monitoring the World Health Organization and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention websites, adhering to the guidelines of the American College Health Association, maintaining an open line of communication with our local health department and hospitals, and benchmarking the activities of other colleges and universities.

Finally, we understand that you may have additional questions about avian influenza itself and have prepared the attached summary as a resource for the college community. In addition, more information about the virus is available from the following websites:

World Health Organization: www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/flu/avian

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: <http://pandemicflu.gov>

In addition, all of these materials and links are available on the college's website:
www.bridgew.edu/avianflu.

If necessary, important updates and announcements will be distributed via email and contain the subject line "AVIAN FLU UPDATE." All updates will also be posted to the college website and electronic bulletin boards, as well as the main college phone line at (508) 531-1777.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free contact either myself or Mary Lou Frias, senior director of BSC Health Services, at extension 1252.

Sincerely,

David Ostroth
Vice President for Student Affairs
Co-Chair, BSC Pandemic Planning Team