

U-M students cover mouths for flu study



ALAN WARREN, THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Nyla Holland, a University of Michigan junior from Southfield, wears a surgical mask as she gets dinner Tuesday at the Betsey Barbour residence hall. She and hundreds of other students are part of a flu study being done by the U-M School of Public Health.

Masked crusaders

Flu study starts for U-M students

BY GEOFF LARCOM
News Staff Reporter

Liliana LaValle and hundreds of University of Michigan students are wearing surgical masks around campus these days, but there's no cause for alarm and they're not auditioning for a hospital TV show.

LaValle, a resident of Couzens Hall, and the other masked students are participating in a U-M study to determine whether masks can help prevent the spread of influenza. While some of the students may have volunteered for educational and altruistic reasons, others may have just wanted a spare \$100 — the fee for participating in the study, which will last a maximum of six weeks.

This is the first time the mask theory has been studied in a residence hall setting, said Allison Aiello, a professor of epidemiology and a co-principal investigator of the School of Public Health study, along with fellow professor Arnold Monto.

Residence halls, where students room together and share hallways, bathrooms

and dining areas, are an ideal setting to study the spread of such an airborne virus, the researchers say.

The study is funded by a \$1.3 million grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and coincides with the seasonal arrival of influenza on the U-M campus.

Seven residence halls are taking part in the study. Residents in Alice Lloyd, Couzens, Betsey Barbour and Helen Newberry are wearing masks, and residents in Bursley Hall on North Campus are wearing masks and using a hand sanitizer. A control group in East Quad and Stockwell is not using either measure, but subjects will participate in regular online surveys if they start to show flu symptoms.

Participating students are expected to wear the masks around their dorms, while other locations are optional.

Those who wear face masks and complete surveys will receive \$100. Participants in the control group will be paid \$40 for completing the online surveys. Getting

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Study still recruiting

sick and having your throat swabbed for a specimen is worth an extra \$25.

The project began this week, after the U-M Health Service reported a case of the flu on campus, the trigger to start the study. So far, more than 1,000 students are taking part, with about 650 of them wearing surgical masks, Aiello said. U-M is continuing to recruit students and hopes to get a sample size of more than 2,000.

Aiello said the study could help researchers know how to deal with a flu pandemic. "We're looking forward to getting this data and studying it," she said. "It's nice to be part of something that could make history."

LaValle, a freshman from Ann Arbor, said she's doing it for the money and because she's glad to help out with relevant medical research. She said some people who didn't volunteer were worried people would make fun of them for wearing a mask, but such a prospect didn't bother her.

"I don't think it's really that much of a hassle," she said. "You'd think by college, everybody would be over that."

News Staff Reporter Geoff Larcom can be reached at 734-994-6838 or glarcom@annarbornews.com.