

# BE A FLU FIGHTER -

Best Practices for Vaccinating  
Healthcare Workers against Influenza

As manufacturers have begun shipping vaccine for the 2013-2014 flu season and vaccination programs are in full force, hospitals are feeling the pressure to make vaccinations mandatory for employees. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says the vaccine is the most effective means of protecting workers and adds a crucial layer of safety for highly vulnerable patients such as newborns, the elderly and those with compromised immune systems.



The best way to prevent transmission of influenza to patients is to mandate vaccination of healthcare workers. Last winter, just under two-thirds of healthcare workers got a seasonal flu shot, according to the CDC, even though universal vaccination of healthcare workers is supported by numerous scientific and medical groups. In fact, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services is expected to make flu vaccination rates an item on which a hospital's quality of care is rated by next year.

This guide provides information on the best practices used for vaccinating healthcare workers against influenza as well as links to additional resources, forms and examples of employee communication methods.

## FACTS

Research shows that the unvaccinated staff has a good chance of getting sick and passing that infection on to at-risk patients. Medical institutions that have adopted a requirement that their employees get the shot saw their rates of vaccination increase to an average of 98.1 percent, according to the CDC's MMWR report.



Rapid and measurable increases in vaccination coverage followed institutional requirements, according to *Vaccine*. Another policy that has boosted shot rates in some hospitals, just shy of a full coverage mandate, is the condition that any employees who decline vaccination be required to wear a surgical mask while caring for patients or *being within three feet of patients* during the flu season.

## WHAT WORKS

The CDC and The Joint Commission report that the following best practices have been successful in increasing healthcare employee vaccination rates.

- Employer covers cost of program
- Employees not vaccinated must sign a declination form and wear a mask while caring for patients *or being in close proximity of patients (3 feet)* during the flu season
- Expand program to include employees' families
- Hold clinics on multiple days
- Offer vaccine during expanded hours, off-site, weekends and off-hour sessions
- Use rolling carts to deliver vaccine to those unable to attend clinics
- Departments with low compliance are visited to improve rates

In addition, the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology, the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology Inc. and the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases also support the use of multi-faceted programs that include the elements above.



## EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION

Healthcare workers sometimes do not have accurate information about the disease and vaccine. The CDC recommends that the following basic information be provided to healthcare providers as part of any educational or communications effort.



- The benefits of influenza vaccination *and information that dispels myths about vaccination*, such as “getting the flu shot always gives me the flu” and why that can’t happen
- The potential impact and severity of influenza illness for healthcare providers and their patients
- The epidemiology of influenza and its modes of transmission, diagnosis and treatment
- Nonvaccine infection control strategies such as antiviral medications and isolation precautions.

Other tools you can use include online education modules, quizzes, or an internal Web site to support staff education. Host an open house where employees can get information about the vaccine along with vouchers for their vaccination. Staff members with early participation can be eligible for prizes.



The Joint Commission recommends using a variety of mechanisms to promote the vaccination program such as fliers, posters, e-mails, newsletter articles, paycheck fliers and in-service training. Create departmental competitions rewarding winners with a newsletter article or prizes. Arrange for the CEO and other members of the leadership to be among the first immunized.

Tools for getting the word out can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/NIVW/resources.htm> and [www.immunize.org](http://www.immunize.org).

Position statements supporting mandatory immunization also are available and can be used to help develop and implement a mandatory vaccination policy. There also are numerous other Web sites and national resources available.

## RESOURCES

CDC’s Flu Vaccination Resource <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/>

The Joint Commission’s report on improving vaccination rates [http://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/1/8/Flu\\_Monograph.pdf](http://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/1/8/Flu_Monograph.pdf)

Declination of Influenza Vaccination Form, Example One <http://www.immunize.org/catg.d/p4068.pdf>

Refusal to Receive Vaccination Form, Example Two <http://www.apic.org/Content/NavigationMenu/PracticeGuidance/Topics/Influenza/SampleDeclinationForm2.pdf>

List of position statements from TJC, CDC, AAP, ACP, AHA, AMDA, APHA, APIC, IDSA and SHEA

<http://www.immunize.org/catg.d/p2014.pdf>

<http://www.flu.gov/professional/hospital/index.html>

