

Talking Points

Influenza Vaccination Policies for Healthcare Personnel

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Receiving the influenza (flu) vaccine is the single best way to prevent against contracting or spreading influenza, a contagious respiratory illness caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs.

- According to current national guidelines, unless medically contraindicated, **all people age 6 months and older should be vaccinated against influenza every year.**
- Those most susceptible to complications from the flu include young children, adults age 65 years and older, pregnant women, and people with chronic health conditions and/or weakened immune systems. However, flu can be severe in healthy persons of any age.
- Each year, the flu contributes to an average 220,000 hospitalizations and from 3,300 to 49,000 deaths in the United States.

Flu vaccines are FDA-approved and the safest, most effective way to protect people from the flu.

- **Vaccination is the most effective means to prevent the flu.** However, how well the flu vaccine works can range widely from season to season and also can vary depending on who is being vaccinated. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) monitor the safety of all vaccines licensed in the United States. Flu vaccines have been safely produced and administered since the 1940s.
- There are several vaccine options for the 2016-2017 flu season. For many vaccine recipients, more than one type or brand of vaccine may be used depending on the CDC and [Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices \(ACIP\) recommendations](#). The ACIP does not recommend use of [live attenuated influenza vaccine \(LAIV\)](#), commonly known by the brand name FluMist®, during the 2016-2017 season due to its low level of effectiveness in previous seasons. Visit MDHHS's 2016-2017 flu vaccine [presentation chart](#) for more information.
- **The influenza vaccine cannot cause the disease.** Flu vaccines work by priming the body's defenses in the event that a person is exposed to an actual flu virus. Injected vaccine contains dead viruses that are unable to produce illness. It takes about two weeks after receiving flu vaccine to develop full immunity, so it is possible for a person to contract the flu during the time immediately after being vaccinated.
- Side effects from the flu vaccine are generally uncommon and may include short-term soreness and/or redness at the injection site. Serious adverse reactions are extremely rare, and the benefits of receiving a flu vaccine far outweigh any risks.

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Achieving high influenza vaccination rates of healthcare personnel (HCP) is a critical step in preventing transmission of flu between HCP and patients.

- **Since 1984, the CDC has recommended that all HCP receive the influenza vaccine every year.**
- **Influenza vaccination for HCP is an important part of patient safety and a comprehensive infection control program.** Unvaccinated HCP can expose patients to the flu virus.
- **The flu virus can be transmitted by both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals.** Only about 50 percent of infected people will develop the classic clinical symptoms of influenza; but 100 percent of infected people can spread the disease.
- Employees of healthcare organizations have both ethical and professional obligations to act in the best interests of their patients' health.
- Multiple [studies](#) have shown that HCP influenza vaccination has reduced patient mortality.

Hospitals are individually best positioned to understand the unique needs of their patients and communities. Requiring HCP vaccination is a local decision, made with the best interests of patients in mind.

- Hospitals have increased voluntary HCP influenza vaccination rates since 1981. An estimated [91.2 percent](#) of hospital-based HCP in Michigan reported receiving influenza vaccination in the 2015-2016 influenza season.
- Multifaceted, employer-mandated vaccination programs have been found to be the single most effective strategy to increase HCP flu vaccination rates. Nationally, self-reported flu vaccination coverage among those required to be vaccinated was [96 percent, compared with 44 percent](#) among those not subject to a requirement.
- Mandating immunization is not a new concept. Many healthcare facilities have long required specific vaccines and a tuberculin skin test as conditions for employment or for working in specific areas of the facility.

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