



Why Getting an Annual Flu Vaccination Makes Sense

A Message for Health Care Entity Administrators

Why are flu vaccinations important?

Ensuring that your employees get flu vaccinations every year:

- lowers absenteeism during the flu season.
- saves money.
- prevents consumers from getting the flu from your staff.

How effective is the flu vaccine?

For generally healthy adults, studies indicate that annual flu vaccinations are between 60-70% effective at preventing the flu. While not perfect, vaccinations are the single most effective way of preventing the transmission of flu in health care facilities. This means that maximizing flu vaccinations is an important part of any comprehensive infection control program.

The flu season typically occurs between November 1 to March 31 of the following year. The best time to get a vaccination is as soon as the flu vaccine becomes available. It takes 2 weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop and protect the body from infection. Protection lasts about a year,

so a vaccine should be obtained annually.

Does prevention pay?

Yes. A clinical study reports the following benefits of immunizing healthy employees ages 18-64:

- 25%↓ in upper respiratory infections.
- 43%↓ in absenteeism for flu.
- 36%↓ in absenteeism from all causes (such as caring for family members with flu).
- 44%↓ in doctor visits from flu-like symptoms.

The estimated cost savings associated with the flu vaccination, including medical costs and absenteeism, is \$46.50 per employee vaccinated.

How do I increase the vaccination rates of my employees?

The most effective ways to increase vaccination rates are:

- making flu vaccination a condition of employment.
- offering vaccinations onsite for more than one day.
- providing vaccination free of charge.

If you are providing flu vaccination onsite, note that a personal reminder to your employees to get vaccinated as well as publicizing the benefits of vaccinations are associated with increased vaccination rates.

Where can I get information about low-cost influenza vaccine?

Contact your local public health agency first. You may also contact CDPHE's Immunization Program at 303-692-2650 to obtain information about cooperative programs for purchasing influenza vaccine. Lastly, the Colorado Adult Immunization Coalition (CAIC) sometimes has information regarding how to obtain lower cost vaccines. You may contact CAIC at 303-692-2789.

Are there regulations requiring health care entities to reduce the transmission of seasonal influenza?

Yes. There are regulations regarding the influenza immunization of healthcare workers under 6 CCR 1011-1, Chapter II, Part 10. You can also find a summary of the requirements and a toolkit for implementation at www.healthfacilities.info under the Licensure tab at "Occurrences/Influenza Vaccination Reporting."



Why Getting an Annual Flu Vaccination Makes Sense

A Message for Health Care Entity Employees

How contagious is the flu?

Flu is extremely contagious. Studies indicate that a significant number of employees report to work when they are ill – a practice known as presenteeism. People with the flu can infect others from the day before symptoms begin through ten days after the onset of illness. If you get the flu, the best thing to do is stay home at least 24 hours after the fever goes away – which is when you stop being contagious.

Why is it important to prevent giving others the flu?

Many of the people you care for are susceptible to flu complications.

Uncomplicated flu is characterized by the onset of symptoms such as coughing, congestion, fever, chills and fatigue that resolves after 3-7 days. However, some people experience complications ranging from moderate to severe that include:

- sinus or ear infections
- dehydration
- bronchitis

- pneumonia
- worsening of chronic health conditions such as asthma, heart disease, diabetes, and neurological disorders.

Consumers most susceptible to flu complications include: children younger than 5, adults age 65 and older, and persons with chronic medical conditions.

Some complications are life-threatening and can result in hospitalizations and death. On average there are about 36,000 flu deaths per year. During a regular flu season, about 90 percent of deaths occur in people 65 years and older.

Are there side effects?

There are two types of flu vaccine: inactivated (killed) flu vaccine which is given by injection and the live attenuated (weakened) flu vaccine which is sprayed into the nostrils. Typically, adults receive the inactivated flu vaccine. You cannot get the flu from inactivated flu vaccine because the virus has been killed. Nevertheless, after receiving a flu vaccination, some people experience fever, aches, and headaches that resolve after 1-2 days. This is

sometimes attributable to exposure to viruses that produce flu-like symptoms. Life threatening reactions are very rare, but if they do occur they typically happen within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination. If you experience a serious allergic reaction (such as breathing problems, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heartbeat, or dizziness) call or go to a doctor right away. Note that if you have had a severe reaction to eggs or a flu vaccination in the past should not get vaccinated before seeing a physician.

What about Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS)?

According to the Centers for Disease Control, about one person per 100,000 develops Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) every year, although very few cases have to do with the flu vaccine. The illness is characterized by fever, nerve damage, and muscle weakness. In 1976, a swine flu vaccine was associated with getting GBS. Several studies have been done to evaluate whether other vaccinations since 1976 result in more cases of GBS. Only one study showed an association and it suggested that 1 person out of 1 million vaccinated persons *may* be at risk of GBS associated with the vaccine.