



Hospitals Should Require Flu Vaccination for all Personnel to Protect Patients' Health and Their Own Health

Issue: Since 1981, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have continually recommended universal influenza vaccination of all health care personnel annually.

Transmission of seasonal influenza (the “flu”) between health care workers and to patients, common in nearly all health care settings—including hospitals, is a significant patient and worker safety issue and poses a public health threat in the United States. Failure to prevent the transmission of seasonal flu between health care workers and patients also increases health care costs.

- Despite the Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy People 2020 goal to vaccinate 90% of health care workers, the CDC reports that during the 2009-2010 flu season 84% of physicians and only 63% of health care workers received flu vaccinations.
- Health care workers who have not received flu vaccinations pose a risk to patients and may transmit the flu to patients before knowing they have it. They also pose a risk to other employees and their families.
- According to a recent study, every year 25% of health care workers show evidence of having the flu.
- Another study found that at least 70% of health care personnel report continuing to work despite having flu-like-symptoms.
- Between 5% and 20% of Americans contract the flu annually resulting in more than 200,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths.
- Annual direct medical costs of the flu average \$10.4 billion.
- Lost earnings due to illness and loss of life associated with flu epidemics average \$16.3 billion every year.

Position: The National Business Group on Health, representing approximately 330 large employers who provide coverage to 55 million Americans, believes hospitals should require annual flu vaccination of all employees as a condition of employment unless employees can demonstrate medical contraindications (with physician documentation) or religious objections. This is a serious patient and worker safety issue.

Employees who invoke either of these exemptions should not engage in direct patient care if they have flu-like symptoms. When seemingly healthy, hospitals should either:

- Reassign these employees to non-patient care areas; or

- Require them to wear masks at all times during flu season when delivering care to patients.

Hospital personnel receiving annual flu vaccinations should include:

- All personnel who receive a direct paycheck from the hospital facility;
- Credentialed non-employees including licensed, independent practitioners affiliated with the hospital, but not necessarily on the payroll; and
- Other non-credentialed, non-employee personnel including health professional students, volunteers, contract employees, construction workers, and medical or pharmaceutical vendors.

Requiring Flu Vaccinations for Hospital Personnel is the Right Thing to Do

- Hospitals have an obligation to prevent the spread of infection to patients in their care.
- Health care consumers also have the right to assume that health care personnel and the organizations that employ them will take all reasonable measures to reduce and avoid transmission of preventable diseases.

Requiring Flu Vaccinations for Health Care Personnel Works

- The National Patient Safety Foundation estimates that institutions with flu vaccination policies experienced an 88% reduction in workforce infection and a 41% reduction in flu-related patient mortality.

Changes in Hospital Policies Can Increase Flu Vaccination Rates Among Personnel

- One hospital recently reported boosting its regular employee vaccination rate from 70% to 96% in eight weeks by adopting a policy requiring all employees who decline vaccination to wear a surgical mask within 6 feet of another person, patient or not, throughout the entire flu season.

Other Organizations Supporting Policies Requiring Flu Vaccination of Hospital Personnel

[American Academy of Pediatrics:](#)

- Recommends implementation of a policy requiring flu vaccination for all health care personnel.

[American College of Physicians:](#)

- Recommends requiring annual influenza vaccine for every health care worker with direct patient care activities, unless a medical contraindication to influenza immunization exists or a religious objection to immunization exists. If, however, health care workers invoke those exceptions, they must still fulfill their ethical obligations to patients and colleagues by not engaging in direct patient care activities if they have flu-like symptoms. In addition, hospitals should either re-assign those health care workers who cannot receive flu vaccines due to medical

or religious contraindications to non-patient care areas during flu season or wear a mask at all times during flue season in the context of patient care.

[American Hospital Association:](#)

- Endorses patient safety policies requiring flu vaccination of health care workers. Permits reasonable exclusions that allow employees who cannot receive flu vaccination to wear masks in the presence of patients during flu season.

[Department of Defense \(DoD\):](#)

- Requires flu vaccination for all civilian health care personnel who provide direct patient care in DoD military treatment facilities.

[National Patient Safety Foundation:](#)

- Recognizes vaccine-preventable diseases as a matter of patient safety and supports required flu vaccination of health care workers to protect the health of patients, health care workers, and the community.