

INFLUENZA VACCINATIONS FOR HEALTHCARE PERSONNEL

How widespread is influenza (the “flu”)?

Although influenza is a vaccine-preventable disease, each year about 5-20% of the population becomes infected with the flu virus. During the 2022-2023 flu season, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated 31 million people were ill with influenza, 14 million people visited their healthcare provider, 360,000 people were hospitalized and about 21,000 flu deaths were recorded.

Why are healthcare personnel in San Diego County being asked to get a flu shot?

Healthcare personnel and patients can infect each other with influenza in healthcare settings. By getting vaccinated against the flu, healthcare personnel help to protect patients, including those who are at an increased risk for complications from influenza. Flu vaccination will also protect co-workers, patients’ visitors, and family members.

What is considered a healthcare setting?

Healthcare settings include acute care hospitals, long-term care facilities, physicians' offices, urgent care centers, outpatient clinics, pharmacies, and home healthcare agencies.

Who are considered healthcare personnel?

Healthcare personnel include physicians, nurses, nursing assistants, therapists, technicians, emergency medical service personnel, dental personnel, pharmacists, laboratory personnel, autopsy personnel, students and trainees, and contract staff not employed by the healthcare facility. Flu vaccines are also recommended for people not directly involved in patient care, but those who are part of the healthcare setting and work or volunteer in clerical, food service, housekeeping, laundry, security, maintenance, administration, and billing.

How would a flu shot benefit me?

By vaccinating yourself against the flu, you increase the chances of a healthier flu season for you and your patients, co-workers, and family. You will miss fewer days of work and avoid feeling miserable from a high fever, fatigue, coughing, or other symptoms associated with the flu. Because individuals can be infectious with influenza for a day before they start to feel symptoms, healthcare workers who receive a flu vaccine will be less likely to transmit the virus to vulnerable patients and visitors. Your decision to get vaccinated supports higher quality of care standards for your organization as a whole.

Can't I just wear a mask or stay home if I feel sick?

Unfortunately, by the time healthcare personnel have symptoms of influenza, they will have already exposed many patients. Staying home as a result of illness from a vaccine preventable disease imposes additional burdens on co-workers that could have been avoided.

As a manager in a healthcare setting, what can I do to protect my staff and patients against the flu?

Promote, administer, and provide access to the flu vaccine to all healthcare personnel every year. Encourage sick workers to stay at home and emphasize hand washing and coughing etiquette. Offer appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves, masks, and respirators. Limit the transporting or moving of infectious patients throughout the facility and limit the number of healthcare staff who come into contact with flu patients.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FLU VACCINE FOR HEALTHCARE PERSONNEL

When should I get the flu vaccine?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends getting a flu vaccine each year during flu season as soon as it is available, usually by the end of October. Consider that it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against the flu.

Which vaccine should I get?

Flu vaccines this season protect against three strains (trivalent has two A and one B strains) that are anticipated to be circulating in the community. The CDC has no recommendation or preference for any of the flu vaccine products. The important decision for each person is to get vaccinated for the flu this year and every year.

Who should NOT get vaccinated?

People with severe, life-threatening allergies to flu vaccine or any ingredient in the vaccine (e.g. gelatin) should not take the vaccine. Some people with a history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (a severe paralyzing illness) should not get a flu vaccine. These conditions should be discussed with a healthcare provider. Those with moderate to severe illness should speak with their provider before getting a flu vaccine. People with egg allergies who only experience hives after exposure to eggs can get any licensed and recommended flu vaccine appropriate for their age and health. People who have symptoms other than hives after exposure to egg should receive the age and health appropriate vaccine in a healthcare setting by a healthcare provider who is able to recognize and manage severe allergic conditions. Children younger than 6 months of age are too young to get a flu shot.

Should pregnant women be concerned about getting a flu vaccine?

No, it is very important for pregnant women to get a flu vaccine. Pregnant women have a higher risk for serious complications from influenza than non-pregnant women of the same age. Changes in the immune system, heart, and lungs during pregnancy make pregnant women more prone to severe illness, hospitalization, and potentially death from influenza. Pregnant women who get the flu also have a greater chance of serious health conditions, including premature labor and delivery.

Flu vaccination helps protect women during pregnancy and their babies for up to 6 months after they are born. The quadrivalent nasal spray flu vaccine is never recommended for pregnant women. If you are pregnant, talk to your healthcare provider before getting a flu vaccine.

Where can I get more information about influenza and flu vaccines?

The CDC has a comprehensive website dedicated to the seasonal flu; visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.com> for detailed information about the importance of getting a flu vaccine for healthcare professionals.

