

OSHA FactSheet

Seasonal Influenza Vaccination – Important Protection for Healthcare Workers

Influenza (flu) is a contagious viral respiratory disease that peaks in the winter months. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), influenza causes approximately 200,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths in the U.S. each year.

How influenza spreads

Influenza is easily spread from person to person through coughing and sneezing, and those infected can be contagious before any signs of the flu are present. Young children, the elderly, and those with chronic health problems are at particular risk for severe complications from the flu.

Reasons for healthcare workers to be vaccinated

Healthcare workers are at high risk for contracting influenza through their exposure to high risk patients. The CDC has classified healthcare workers as a high priority group for yearly vaccinations that are highly effective at preventing influenza. Not only are healthcare workers in danger of contracting influenza, they can also spread the illness to their family and to patients.

Employers have a duty to create a safe work environment. Encouraging influenza vaccination for their healthcare employees is one method of doing this. The current rate of influenza vaccination among healthcare workers is disappointing, and increasing this rate could significantly enhance healthcare worker safety and increase their productivity.

JCAHO accreditation

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) acknowledges that influenza immunization of healthcare workers is of vital importance. On January 1, 2007, JCAHO began requiring, as part of their accreditation process, that organizations institute annual influenza pro-

grams, including offering vaccination on-site and promoting healthcare worker participation.

Who else needs to be vaccinated

Individuals at high risk for flu complications, and their close contacts, should be vaccinated yearly. People at high risk include children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years, adults over 50, individuals with certain medical conditions, pregnant women, and people in long-term care facilities and nursing homes. Anyone caring for these individuals should also be vaccinated.

Dispelling influenza vaccine myths

Influenza vaccination is highly effective and adverse effects are rare. Protection usually develops within two weeks of vaccination which is recommended in October or November. The vaccine does not cause the flu. There is an injection and a nasal spray vaccination available. Healthcare workers should consult with their employer to find out which vaccination is used in their healthcare setting, where and when to get vaccinated, and whether the employer provides free vaccinations. Increasingly, employers in healthcare settings are making the vaccine conveniently available to employees during their normal work shifts.

If you decide not to be vaccinated

Employees increase their risk of contracting the flu if they decide to decline vaccination. Influenza vaccination has been determined to be an important protection for healthcare workers because they have a greater risk of

exposure. In addition, healthcare workers can pass the virus to vulnerable patients and take the infection home to their families.

How to get more information

OSHA's website provides this document and other information at www.osha.gov. Additional guidance on influenza vaccination for healthcare workers is available on the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination.

This is one in a series of informational fact sheets highlighting OSHA programs, policies or standards. It does not impose any new compliance requirements. For a comprehensive list of compliance requirements of OSHA standards or regulations, refer to Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations. This information will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. The voice phone is (202) 693-1999; teletypewriter (TTY) number: (877) 889-5627.

For more complete information:



U.S. Department of Labor

www.osha.gov

(800) 321-OSHA

DSTM 11/2007