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# Policy Brief

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## Mandatory Flu Vaccinations and their Importance in the fight against a deadly virus

### Executive Summary

Flu season is back and now is the time to protect you and your loved ones, and patients from the dangers of the flu virus. Every year, US health systems, facilities, and care providers face a daunting public health challenge of preparing for and responding to the spread of seasonal influenza (Yang & Silverman, 2018, p. 3998). Globally, seasonal flu causes an estimated 300,000-500,000 deaths and 3-5 million cases of severe disease every year (Behrman & Offley, 2013, p.18). The CDC, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), and the Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee (HICPAC) recommend that all U.S. health care workers get

vaccinated annually against influenza (CDC, 2018, para1). "The emergence of a novel strain of influenza in the spring of 2009 heightened the urgency of initiatives to vaccinate more healthcare workers against influenza" (Randall, Curran, & Omer, 2013, p. 1771). Many healthcare organizations are enacting vaccination policies requiring their employees to get influenza vaccinations (Yang & Silverman, 2018, p. 2998). Studies have shown an 80% reduction in serologically determined influenza illness with mandated influenza programs (Sheffer, et al. 2011).



### Mortality Trends

The blue arrow represents the start of vaccine campaigns in the 1990s and the downward trend seen in influenza mortality.

## Financial Benefits to Vaccinations

About 17 million work days are lost due to influenza and around 5 Billion dollars in lost wages (Asfaw, A., Rosa, R., Pana-Cryan, R., 2017). When workers are out sick with influenza, this ultimately affects patient care as staff are then pulled to areas they don't commonly work to cover for staff out ill. This ultimately equates to patient safety risks for patients. Hospitals advertising programs for staff vaccinations are a patient satisfier, as visitors feel better protected from contracting the virus due to protocols in place to prevent influenza spread to the patients and their family members. Vaccinating better protects staff and their families. Some



(Docherty, 2018)

employees voice concerns regarding the costs for vaccinations. These costs should be transparent to employees, and many employers provide these vaccinations free of charge to all employees. An infected person can transmit the disease at least one day before experiencing symptoms (Randall et al., 2013, p. 1772). Many healthcare workers who are aware they are ill come to work anyways, and continue to spread the virus for 5-

10 days (Randall et.al., 2013, p. 1772). For those employees who do fall ill from influenza, some hospitals offer paid sick leave as well to better prevent sick employees treating patients, and saved companies on average 1.88 billion/ year in lost wages for employees and missed shifts. This would also help to decrease the spread of infection (Asfaw, Rosa & Pana-Cryan, 2017).

## The Barriers to Compliance



Even with all the recommendations some health care personnel are not in favor of the vaccine. According to the CDC, of the unvaccinated healthcare personnel who did not intend to get the flu vaccination during the flu season, the most common reason reported for not getting vaccinated was that they don't think that flu vaccines work (CDC, 2018, p.6).

The second most common reason was that they don't need the vaccine (CDC, para 8). The third reason, some people think the flu shot makes them sick. Education is

needed to inform staff that the initial reaction is most likely the result of the body's early immune response reacting to a foreign substance entering the body (CDC, 2018, p.6). Others refuse immunization due to Religious beliefs, Medical conditions or personal beliefs for which exemptions should be granted (Behrman & Offley, 2013, p. 19).

# Hospital Influenza Programs



(Schuls-Jacobson, 2018)

## Background & Context

According to Randall et al. (2013), influenza is of special concern in the healthcare setting, as influenza outbreaks have been linked to unvaccinated healthcare workers. An infected person can transmit the disease at least one day before experiencing symptoms. Many healthcare workers who are aware they are ill come to work anyways, and continue to spread the virus for 5-10 days (Randall et al., 2013, p. 1772). According to the AHA (2011), several key national professional organizations have endorsed mandatory policies for influenza vaccination as a condition of employment within their health care facilities (AHA, 2011). These agencies include the Association of Professionals in Infection Control, American Academy of Pediatrics, Infectious Disease Society of America, National Patient Safety Foundation and Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America. While the resources needed to implement a mandatory policy are significant in terms of financial and personnel resources, the benefits of protecting vulnerable patients and reducing employee illness and absenteeism far outweigh the costs. (AHA, 2011).

“Because healthcare workers are ideally situated to acquire and transmit influenza infections, and many of their patients are high risk of severe complications from influenza, the healthcare workers are encouraged to get vaccinated”

(Randall et al., 2013, p. 1771)

## Description and Analysis of Outcomes

“Influenza vaccination coverage among healthcare workers in hospitals with mandatory vaccination was 95.2% compared to 68.2% in hospitals with no such rule” (Randall et al., 2013, p. 1772). In order to be successful, administrative leadership support is essential to ensure an influenza policy is supported and enforced. A policy would be drafted outlining details of the mandate, and a declination form would be included to allow for refusals of the immunization for those unable to receive. Those employees would be directed to then wear a mask upon entering the facility and throughout their work day through the duration of the influenza season. Education would be provided to staff on immunizations and their importance for providing safety for themselves and the patients they care for. Hospitals would then have to decide on appropriate course of action for employees who fail to adhere to the policy clearly outlined. Hospital who have successfully implemented mandated Influenza policies often have resulted in vaccination rates about 90 percent, some upwards to 100% of their employees (AHA, 2011). The following are some specific steps organizations can engage various groups to better protect patients and employees from the influenza virus.

## Recommendations

### Hospitals ("CDC" 2017)

- Implement Education Programs and Guidelines
- Help make Vaccines easily available for staff and patients
- Make a strong flu vaccination recommendation to your patients with education
- Implement a hospital wide immunization mandate or ensure staff that refuse are wearing a mask

### Patients

- Encourage and Educate patients on the importance of protecting themselves every year by being immunized
- Patients should encourage everyone in their household who are eligible to receive the vaccine, to get the vaccine themselves
- Educate on the importance of good hand washing
- Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze. Use your sleeve if you don't have a tissue handy.
- Be mindful of what you touch including keyboards, cell phones, handshakes, and doorknobs
- Avoid rubbing your eyes or touching your inner nose
- Avoid contact with sick individuals
- Use hand sanitizer if soap and water unavailable

### Infection Prevention ("CDC" 2017)

- Create a hospital wide influenza policy for your organization
- Create a multidisciplinary team with infectious disease doc leading the way
- Educate staff on proper hand washing techniques and observe and track staff compliance
- Ensure proper precautions are in place for sick patients
- Have proper masks and PPE readily available in your facility
- Have vaccines readily available and offer flu clinic times
- Ensure staff who have refused vaccination are wearing masks for the duration of flu season
- Track declination forms to assure all staff have been assessed as to their vaccination status
- Have a Interdisciplinary flu committee in place to address barriers and implementation strategies before and during flu season, influenza surveillance, vaccine effectiveness and safety, and vaccine supply

### Healthcare Professionals

("CDC" 2017)

- All Health Care workers Get vaccinated annually
- Ideally vaccination should occur before onset of influenza activity in the community
- Health Care Providers should offer vaccination by the end of October
- Vaccination should continue to be offered as long as influenza virus are circulating
- Make a strong flu vaccination recommendation to your patients
- If you are sick stay home! Don't spread your sickness to others
- Get your family vaccinated and help protect them too



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