

Fact Sheet

Influenza

Recommendation for the Vaccination of Health Care Professionals

Why should health care professionals be immunized for influenza?

Individual, family and patient protection- health care professionals are at an increased risk for acquiring influenza and the influenza vaccine is the best defense against infection.

Herd immunity- more people vaccinated for influenza results in fewer people getting influenza and spreading it in the community. The influenza vaccine works in the same way that other vaccines do- once a significant proportion of the population has received the vaccine disease incidence drops sharply.

Influenza vaccine reduces the likelihood of becoming ill with influenza or transmitting influenza to others.

The types of vaccines recommended for use are:

- Inactivated Influenza Vaccines (IIVs) - IIVs are an inactivated vaccine (containing killed virus) that is given by injection. IIVs comprise a large group of products, which can be administered to people older than 6 months, including healthy persons and those with chronic medical conditions. However, the approved age indications for the various IIV products differ and only age-appropriate products should be administered. IIVs formulations include a regular injection for those 6 months old or older, a higher dose formulation for those 65 and older, and an intradermal formulation for those 18 to 64 years old.
- Recombinant Influenza Vaccine (RIV3) – RIV3 is a trivalent recombinant (contains no dead or live virus) vaccine. RIV3 is indicated for persons aged 18 years or older. RIV3 is manufactured without the use of influenza viruses. No preference is given for RIV3 versus IIV within specified indications.

Timing of vaccination

To avoid missed opportunities for vaccination of persons at increased risk for serious complications of influenza, vaccine may be offered as early as September if available. The optimal time for vaccination efforts is usually during October- November. Vaccine should continue to be sought and administered throughout the influenza season even after influenza activity has been established in the community.

Why people should get the flu vaccine every year

The influenza virus changes every year as it spreads around the world. Since the exact flu viruses are almost never the same from year to year, the strains of influenza in the vaccine changes each year. This is why people need to get a new flu vaccine every year. The vaccine only protects people from influenza for one year.

Who should get vaccinated?

Yearly flu vaccination is recommended for almost everyone over 6 months of age, and is especially important for those people at high risk for developing flu-related complications, such as children younger than five; adults 65 years of age and older; pregnant women; and people with certain medical conditions like heart and lung problems, and diabetes.

Other things health care facilities can do to ensure influenza vaccination

In June, 2006 the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations approved an infection control standard that required accredited organizations to offer influenza vaccinations to staff and volunteers who have close patient contact. The following are recommendations provided by HICPAC/ACIP* for hospitals:

- Educate health care professionals (HCP) on the benefits of influenza vaccination.
- Offer influenza vaccine annually to all eligible HCP. Use either TIV or LAIV for eligible persons.
- Provide influenza vaccination to HCP at the work site and at no cost.
- Obtain signed declination from HCP who decline influenza vaccination for non-medical reasons.
- Monitor influenza vaccination coverage and declination at regular intervals throughout the season.
- Use the level of HCP influenza vaccination coverage as one measure of a patient-safety quality program. Although vaccination rates for health care professionals are typically <40%, with moderate effort, organized campaigns can attain higher rates of vaccination among this population. Physicians, nurses, and other professionals with direct patient contact, including medical emergency-response professionals (paramedics and emergency medical technicians), should be vaccinated, as should employees of nursing home and long-term care facilities.

* Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee (HICPAC) and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)