



Talking Points:

Health Care Worker Influenza Vaccination

✓ What Is Influenza?

- Influenza, commonly called the flu, is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses.
- Each year in the United States, 5 percent to 20 percent of the population is infected with the flu, resulting in 36,000 deaths.
- An estimated 200,000 people are hospitalized annually for complications from the flu.
- Seniors are particularly at risk. One in every 20 deaths in adults over age 65 is associated with the flu.

✓ Why Should Health Care Workers Receive Flu Vaccines?

- Health care workers have a high infection risk from exposure to patients with the flu. Once infected, they can spread the virus to other patients.
- Health care worker vaccination programs have decreased death and disease among elderly patients in long-term care facilities. Raising the immunization rate of health care workers from 5 percent to 50 percent was associated with a nearly 40 percent drop in patient deaths in a study of nursing homes in Scotland.
- Studies have shown that flu vaccination decreases work absenteeism, days worked with decreased effectiveness, visits to health care providers and antibiotic usage for the treatment of secondary infections.
- Flu vaccinations for health care workers have been recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for more than 20 years.
- The flu vaccine is 70 percent to 90 percent effective in preventing influenza in healthy individuals under 65.
- Most people who receive flu vaccinations experience no, or only mild, reactions such as fever or soreness at the injection site. Serious side effects are rare.

✓ What Is the Economic Impact of Influenza?

- The annual cost of the flu in the United States is estimated at between \$3 billion and \$5 billion.
- The flu vaccine saves \$182 in medical costs for every person over age 65 who receives a vaccination.
- One study reported those who received the flu vaccine had 25 percent fewer episodes of respiratory illness, 43 percent fewer days of sick leave from work due to respiratory illness and 44 percent fewer visits to physicians' offices for upper respiratory illness than those who received placebos.
- In a study of 25 disease prevention activities, annual flu immunizations ranked as one of the most cost-effective health measures a person can take and had one of the greatest health impacts.



Although Recommended by CDC, Most Health Care Workers Are Not Vaccinated

- Only 40 percent of health care workers annually are vaccinated against flu.
- The U.S. Healthy People 2010 goal for health care worker flu vaccination is 60 percent.
- A recent study found that health care workers who are African-American, under age 50 or work as health aides had the lowest rates of flu vaccination.
- At least 15 states have passed laws requiring health care workers in long-term care facilities to receive flu vaccinations.



What Can State Legislators Do to Increase Influenza Vaccinations Among Health Care Workers?

- Demonstrate leadership by supporting collaboration among state and local public health agencies, health care professional associations and health care providers to increase flu vaccination rates among health care workers.
- Consider supporting legislation to increase flu vaccination of health care workers, including:
 - Requiring insurers to reduce or eliminate cost-sharing for flu shots;
 - Allowing non-physician health care professionals such as pharmacists to administer flu shots;
 - Encouraging local and state health departments to develop or use existing educational materials in various languages to reach non-English speaking health care workers;
 - Requiring health care facilities to report flu vaccination rates of their employees;
 - Directing state immunization registries to collect data on health care worker immunizations and appropriating additional funds for this purpose; and
 - Encouraging health care facilities to follow CDC recommendations on health care worker immunization requirements, including providing the flu vaccine at no cost to all workers with direct patient contact.

For more detail, see the Legislator Policy Brief, “Healthcare Worker Influenza Vaccination,” by visiting: <http://www.healthystates.csg.org/Publications/>.

If you would like more information, references, or to explore this topic in greater depth, please:

- send your inquiry to <http://www.healthystates.csg.org/> (keyword: inquiry) or
- call the CSG Health Policy Group at (859) 244–8000.

This Healthy States publication is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, under Cooperative Agreement U38/CCU424348. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. government.