

SEVEN TRUTHS ABOUT INFLUENZA VACCINATION OF HEALTHCARE WORKERS

(Adapted from Dr. Gregory Poland, Director, Vaccine Research Group, Mayo Clinic)

1. Influenza infection is a serious illness causing significant morbidity and mortality adversely affecting the public health on an annual basis.

- Influenza is the sixth leading cause of death in the US, killing an average of 36,000 Americans annually.
- Influenza kills as many or more people than breast cancer (40,000) and three times as many as HIV/AIDS
- Average of 200,000 excess hospitalizations due to influenza related illnesses
- Highest rates of complications and hospitalizations are among young children and adults >65.

2. Influenza infected healthcare workers can transmit this deadly virus to vulnerable patients.

- You can transmit influenza virus whether you're symptomatic or not. Many people do not take the vaccine because the "never get the flu"
- According to Dr. Poland this is not completely true -
 - Blood test studies suggest that as many as 50% of infected healthcare workers have no symptoms
- Individuals are contagious up to 4 days before onset of symptoms and approximately 5 days after onset of symptoms.
- Multiple studies have shown that many healthcare workers do not stay home when feeling ill.
- In 1998 there was an influenza outbreak in a NICU ward that found the following:
 - 19 of the 54 infants tested positive for Influenza
 - Six were symptomatic; one infant died
 - Healthcare workers were thought to be the source since none of the mothers were infected
 - Only 15% of the staff had received the flu vaccine
 - 29% of staff worked while feeling ill

Imagine if your baby died from an infection that was preventable with a \$15 vaccine.

3. Influenza vaccination of healthcare workers saves money for employees and employers and prevents workplace disruption.

According to articles published in the New England Journal of Medicine, healthy working adults who receive the flu vaccine have:

- 25% fewer upper respiratory infections
- 44% fewer doctor visits
- 42% fewer sick days off
- One of the studies based on 25,000 adults showed 48-57% reduction in pneumonia hospitalizations
- Direct savings per year averaged \$117 per person immunized

4. Influenza vaccination of healthcare workers is already recommended by the CDC and is a standard of care.

- This is also endorsed by numerous medical and infectious prevention organizations and societies
- Even with a small percentage of people who are unable to take the vaccine, "herd immunity" will protect unimmunized coworkers and their patients because of the decreased likelihood of someone working while infected

5. Immunization requirements are effective and work in increasing vaccination rates.

- Rubella and hepatitis vaccine requirements have been successful in healthcare worker vaccination/protection against these pathogens
- Influenza vaccine is 70-90% effective in healthy persons <65 years of age
- School vaccine requirements result in 90-95% immunization rates
- On the other hand, voluntary vaccine programs among healthcare workers result in ~50% or less immunization rate

6. Healthcare workers and healthcare systems have an ethical and moral duty to protect vulnerable patients from transmissible diseases.

- Healthcare workers have an obligation to prevent harm from occurring to their patients
 - Being vaccinated against influenza to avoid causing harm falls within this obligation

According to a recent article in the American Journal of Infection Control:

- A standard of due care involves taking care (that which would be done by a reasonable and prudent person) to avoid causing harm.
 - “. . . The facts therefore imply that a reasonable and prudent healthcare worker has a duty to be vaccinated against influenza”

7. The healthcare system will either lead or be lambasted.

- Reports of nosocomial (health care acquired) influenza are surfacing with the popular media
- As the public becomes aware of how low vaccine rates are among healthcare workers, the healthcare system will lose credibility
- Several states have already began mandating vaccination in healthcare
- Litigation (lawsuits) have already begun to take place
- The healthcare profession has the opportunity to demonstrate we will do the right thing for our patients

Getting vaccinated protects our vulnerable patients, prevents you from bringing disease home to your family and loved ones, improves patient safety, and significantly decreases morbidity and mortality (disease and death).

Think About It . . .

If people were told there was a vaccine that was 70-90% effective in preventing breast cancer which takes the lives of approximately 40,000 Americans each year, but there may be side effects such as a temporary sore arm and possibly some headaches and body aches; how long would the line to get the vaccine be? How many in line would be the same people who won't get a flu vaccine which prevents a disease that takes as many or more lives each year?

Did You Know . . .

The flu vaccine is not from a live virus, thus it cannot actually cause the flu. Studies have clearly shown that individuals receiving the flu vaccine when compared to those receiving a placebo vaccine had only one significant difference in documented complaints of side effects - more complained of a sore arm in those receiving the actual flu shot compared to the placebo.