

# INFLUENZA VACCINATIONS FOR HEALTH CARE PERSONNEL

## How widespread is influenza (the “flu”)?

Although influenza is a vaccine-preventable disease, each year about 5-20% of the population becomes infected with the flu virus. In San Diego County during the 2017-18 influenza season, 20,833 flu cases were reported, with 342 deaths and 320 ICU cases.

## Why are health care personnel in San Diego County being asked to get a flu shot?

Health care personnel and patients can infect each other with influenza in any health care setting. By getting vaccinated against the flu, health care personnel will help to protect patients who are at increased risk from influenza. Flu vaccination will also protect co-workers, patients’ visitors, and your family members at home.

## What is considered a health care setting?

Health care settings include acute care hospitals, long-term care facilities, physicians' offices, urgent care centers, outpatient clinics, pharmacies, and home health care agencies.

## Who are considered to be health care personnel?

Health care personnel include physicians, nurses, nursing assistants, therapists, technicians, emergency medical service personnel, dental personnel, pharmacists, laboratory personnel, autopsy personnel, students and trainees, and contract staff not employed by the health care facility. Additionally, flu vaccines are recommended for people not directly involved in patient care, but those who are part of the health care setting and work as employees or volunteers in clerical, food service, housekeeping, laundry, security, maintenance, administration, and billing.

## How would a flu shot benefit me?

By vaccinating yourself against the flu, you increase the chances of a healthier flu season for yourself, patients, co-workers, and family. You will miss fewer days of work and avoid feeling miserable from a high fever, fatigue, coughing, and other symptoms associated with the flu. Because individuals can be infectious with influenza for a day before they start to feel symptoms, healthcare workers who receive flu vaccine will be less likely to transmit the virus to vulnerable patients and visitors. Your decision to vaccinate supports higher quality of care standards for your organization as a whole.

## Can't I just wear a mask or stay home if I feel sick?

Unfortunately, by the time health care personnel have symptoms of influenza, they will have already exposed many patients. Staying home with a vaccine preventable disease imposes additional burdens on co-workers that could be avoided.

## As a manager in a health care setting, what can I do to protect my staff and patients against the flu?

Promote, administer, and provide access to the annual flu vaccine to all health care personnel. Encourage sick workers to stay at home and emphasize hand washing and coughing etiquette. Offer appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves, masks, and respirators. Limit transporting or moving infectious patients throughout the facility, and limit the number of health care staff members who come into contact with flu patients.



# COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FLU VACCINE FOR HEALTH CARE PERSONNEL

## When should I get the flu vaccine?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends getting the annual flu vaccine as soon as it is available, usually no later than November. Consider that it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against the flu.

## Which flu vaccine should I get?

Flu vaccines this season protect against three strains of the virus (trivalent has two A and one B strain) or four strains (quadrivalent has two A and two B strains) that are anticipated to be circulating in the community. The CDC has no recommendation or preference for any of the flu vaccine products. The important decision for each person is to **get** vaccinated for the flu this year and every year.

## Who should not get vaccinated?

People with severe, life-threatening allergies to flu vaccine or any ingredient in the vaccine (e.g. gelatin) should not take the vaccine. Some people with a history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (a severe paralyzing illness) should not get this vaccine. These conditions should be discussed with a health care provider. Those with moderate to severe illness should speak with their provider before getting the flu vaccine. People with egg allergies, who only experience hives after exposure to egg, can get any licensed and recommended flu vaccine appropriate for their age and health. People who have symptoms other than hives after exposure to egg should receive the age and health appropriate vaccine in a health care setting by a health care provider who is able to recognize and manage severe allergic conditions.

## I'm pregnant. What should I be concerned about?

It is very important for pregnant women to get the flu vaccination. Pregnant women have a higher risk for serious complications from influenza than non-pregnant women of the same age. Changes in the immune system, heart, and lungs during pregnancy make pregnant women more prone to severe illness, hospitalization, and potentially death from influenza. Pregnant women with flu also have a greater chance of serious health conditions, including premature labor and delivery.

Flu vaccination helps protect women during pregnancy and their babies for up to 6 months after they are born. Quadrivalent nasal spray flu vaccine is never recommended for pregnant women. If you are pregnant, talk to your health care provider before your flu vaccination.

## Where can I get more information about influenza and the flu vaccine?

Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>, a comprehensive website from the CDC dedicated to the seasonal flu. It particularly provides detailed information about the importance of getting the flu vaccine for health care professionals.

