

Information About Mandatory Flu Vaccine Programs

There are myths that the flu vaccine is not safe.

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations recommends that healthcare personnel and patients get vaccinated. Education as part of a comprehensive infection control program is necessary to achieve higher levels of vaccination.¹⁸

Vaccination rates among hospital workers on the rise.

- Despite misinformation about the vaccine, seasonal influenza vaccination rates among hospital workers have significantly increased in recent years to 72 percent.³⁰
- It is believed that enough immunity to prevent possible outbreak, or herd immunity, can occur at vaccination rates of around 80 percent and as low as 70 percent.²³

Comprehensive infection control programs work.

- Numerous peer-reviewed studies show that comprehensive educational programs that can dispel flu vaccine myths can further increase voluntary vaccination rates from 80 percent to 96 percent.^{2,3,4,5,6}
- The hospital system at the University of Iowa, where SEIU represents the nurses, achieved a voluntary flu vaccination rate of 86 percent in 2009.⁷
- Voluntary hepatitis B vaccination programs can serve as models for noncompulsory influenza vaccination programs. Annual classroom-based educational sessions, where employees can have their questions addressed, have resulted in acceptance rates of more than 80 percent.³¹

Leading professional organizations reject mandatory flu vaccination programs.

- In 2006, the Joint Commission (formerly JCAHO) considered making flu vaccines mandatory but rejected the idea following a public comment period.¹⁰
- The American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM), the nation's largest organization of occupational medicine physicians. ACOEM maintains that mandatory vaccination programs divert limited time, attention and patient care resources from more effective strategies to improve infection control.^{11,12,13}
- The director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Dr. Thomas Frieden, stated in 2009 that he does not support mandatory flu vaccination.⁹
- This year Dr. John Howard, the director of the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Health, a branch of the CDC has stated that mandatory vaccination "leads to a false sense of security."²⁸

No federal or state governmental health agency supports mandatory flu vaccination, nor does any other country.

- The state of New York abandoned its mandate in 2009 and did not reinstate it this year.

The flu vaccine may lead to a false sense of security.

- The vaccine's effectiveness varies from year to year, possibly leading to a false sense of security if major gaps in infection control programs remain.¹¹

Mandatory flu vaccination programs and misguided masking requirements can have a negative impact on workers.

Conversely, a voluntary program, focusing on education, with the advantages of an employer-provided benefit, can have a positive impact and achieve nearly the same level of cooperation.¹⁸

- Mandatory flu vaccination programs have driven qualified nurses and other healthcare workers from their professions.¹⁸
- There is insufficient scientific evidence to support requiring unvaccinated healthcare workers to wear surgical masks for flu transmission prevention.

- To the contrary, there is research showing that surgical masks do not protect healthcare workers from exposure to airborne flu and that surgical masks are not effective in containing infectious particles from the wearer because of their face seal leakage and filter performance.^{15,16,17,26}
- The wearing of masks without a documented medical purpose has been described as a “scarlet letter” by hospital managers designed to shame healthcare workers into getting vaccinated.²⁴

Information compiled by William Borwegen, MPH, director, Occupational Health and Safety, Service Employees International Union, Washington, D.C., Sept. 25, 2009, Updated Oct. 29, 2010.

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