

Seasonal Influenza Vaccination

Important Protection for Healthcare Workers

Influenza (flu) is a contagious viral respiratory illness that peaks during the winter season in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that about 8% of the U.S. population gets sick with the flu each year. Between 2010-2020, an estimated 28 million illnesses, including 420,000 hospitalizations and 35,000 deaths, occurred on average each year due to seasonal flu. Vaccination is a safe way to prevent infection, reduce the severity and duration of illness, and decrease the spread to others. It is strongly encouraged for healthcare workers who have increased exposure.

How does influenza spread?

Influenza is easily spread from person to person through coughing, sneezing, or talking. Those infected can be contagious from one day before symptoms begin up to 7 days after, but they are most infectious in the 3-4 days after symptoms develop. Vaccination, good [hand hygiene](#), [cough and sneeze etiquette](#), and staying home when sick are critical to prevent transmission.

How effective are flu vaccines?

The effectiveness of the vaccine varies from year to year depending on how well it matches the circulating flu viruses. From 2004-2020, the CDC estimated vaccine effectiveness in the United States ranged from [40%–60%](#) when vaccines were well-matched.

Protection from influenza usually develops within two weeks of vaccination. While some who are vaccinated may still become ill, the vaccine can reduce the severity and duration of illness and decrease the spread to others.

Why should healthcare workers get vaccinated?

[Healthcare workers](#) are a high-priority group for vaccinations because they are more likely to be exposed to the flu through contact with sick patients. They can also spread the flu to close contacts and patients. Vaccination is especially important for anyone who works directly with patients or in high-risk settings such as hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, home care, or congregate settings such as rehabilitation and assisted living facilities.

What can employers do?

Employers have a duty to create a safe work environment and should encourage all workers to get a flu vaccination. This is especially true for healthcare workers. The [CDC](#) and [Joint Commission](#) (which accredits US healthcare organizations and programs) have a number of strategies available to improve healthcare personnel influenza vaccination rates. One strategy increasingly used in healthcare settings is to make the vaccine available to workers during their normal work shifts.

Who else needs to be vaccinated?

The CDC recommends that most people 6 months or older get a seasonal flu vaccination each year. Vaccination should be obtained by the end of October to maximize protection for the duration of the flu season; however, it is encouraged throughout the year when flu viruses are actively circulating.

Who is at higher risk of flu complications?

Those at higher risk for severe illness or complications of the flu include adults 65 years and older, young children, pregnant women, and individuals with some chronic conditions such as asthma or heart disease.

The CDC estimates that between 70% and 85% of flu-related deaths and between 50% and 70% of flu-related hospitalizations occurred in people 65 years and older.

Can the vaccine cause flu?

This is a common **misconception**. The vaccine itself does not cause the flu, and adverse effects from the seasonal flu vaccine are rare. Following vaccination, some may experience mild flu-like symptoms for a day or two while the body's immunity ramps up.

Where can I get more information?

Find more information about influenza from:

- [OSHA Healthcare Worker Guidance](#)
- [CDC Seasonal Influenza Vaccination Resources for Health Professionals](#)

Workers' Rights

Workers have the right to:

- Working conditions that do not pose a risk of serious harm.
- Receive information and training (in a language and vocabulary the worker understands) about workplace hazards, methods to prevent them, and the OSHA standards that apply to their workplace.
- Review records of work-related injuries and illnesses.

- File a complaint asking OSHA to inspect their workplace if they believe there is a serious hazard or that their employer is not following OSHA's rules. OSHA will keep all identities confidential.
- Exercise their rights under the law without retaliation, including reporting an injury or raising health and safety concerns with their employer or OSHA. If a worker has been retaliated against for using their rights, they must file a complaint with OSHA as soon as possible, but no later than 30 days.

For additional information, see [OSHA's Workers page](#) (www.osha.gov/workers).

How to Contact OSHA

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to ensure these conditions for America's workers by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education and assistance. For more information, visit www.osha.gov or call OSHA at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), TTY 1-877-889-5627.

This is one in a series of informational fact sheets highlighting OSHA programs, policies or standards. It does not impose any new compliance requirements. For a comprehensive list of compliance requirements of OSHA standards or regulations, refer to Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations. This information will be made available to sensory-impaired individuals upon request. The voice phone is (202) 693-1999; teletypewriter (TTY) number: (877) 889-5627.

