

Protecting Patient Safety in West Virginia: Flu Vaccinations for Health Care Workers

Position: The West Virginia Immunization Network (WIN) strongly supports Flu vaccination for 100% of health care workers, employees, and volunteers in health care facilities. Health care organizations should remove administrative and financial barriers to vaccinations for health care workers and employees and offer vaccinations as part of their patient safety program.

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Why Employees of Health Care Facilities?

Many health care workers and other employees are at risk for exposure to and possible transmission of vaccine-preventable diseases.

Influenza immunizations among health care facility employees are a matter of patient safety as the transmission of influenza can occur from an infected individual as early as a day before the onset of symptoms, putting patients and coworkers at risk. Influenza outbreaks have caused illness and death among patients in health care facilities.

Flu vaccination of health care employees prevents patients, at high risk for flu, from becoming infected through exposure to infected workers. However, influenza vaccination rates among health care workers were only 45% in 2008 (CDC; National Health Interview Survey; 2008).

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) strongly recommends that all health care workers be vaccinated against influenza to reduce staff illnesses and absenteeism during the influenza season and to reduce the spread of influenza to and from workers and patients.

Transmission of influenza among health care workers causes absenteeism and losses in productivity resulting in disruption in the provision of health care services.

Currently 15 states have regulations regarding vaccination of health care workers in long term care facilities (MMWR; July 29, 2005)

What are the costs associated with not getting flu immunizations?

- Over 226,000 excess hospitalizations occur each year due to influenza, with 63% occurring in adults 65 and over. (CDC; MMWR; July 31, 2009)
- The total economic burden of annual influenza epidemics in the US amount to about \$87 billion. (Molinari, et al., 2007)
- Influenza vaccines can prevent illness in approximately 70% - 90% of healthy adults under the age of 65. (CDC; MMWR; July 31, 2009)
- Vaccination of healthy adults has resulted in decreased work absenteeism and decreased use of health care resources, including use of antibiotics. Reductions of up to 44% in health care provider visits, 45% in lost workdays; 28% in days working with reduced effectiveness and 25% in antibiotic use have been reported. (CDC; MMWR; July 29, 2005)

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