

# Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Required Flu Vaccine

## Why are we requiring the flu vaccine?

Each year, approximately 24,000 people die and 150,000 are hospitalized due to the flu. These are preventable deaths. Requiring an annual flu vaccine demonstrates our commitment to protect the safety and health of our patients, many of whom already have weakened immune systems, as well as visitors, co-workers and our families. Vaccination for Health Care Workers (HCW) has been recommended for years, yet vaccination rates remain at 61.9 percent nationally. Over the past few years, voluntary programs have not been effective at significantly increasing vaccination rates. Requiring flu vaccinations is a step that has also been taken by many of the health care systems and hospitals throughout the nation.

## Who has adopted the required flu vaccination policy?

All of University of Miami Miller School Of Medicine facilities are being required to adhere to the vaccination policy based on the nature of the facility. For a list of facilities affected, go to: [Influenza Requirements by Location](#).

## Who does this apply to?

The required influenza vaccination program applies to all HCWs and staff that work in facilities where patient care is provided. At UHealth, HCWs are all those Miller School of Medicine (MSOM) Workers with face-to-face interactions (both clinical and non-clinical) with patients. This would include all MSOM (both Faculty and Staff) Hospital and Clinic workers regardless of location.

## What is considered patient care or clinical areas?

These are defined by the physical or recognized borders of hospitals, clinics or other sites where clinical operations occur. These include but are not limited to: inpatient and outpatient areas where patients may be seen, evaluated, treated or waiting to be seen. For a list of facilities affected, go to: [Influenza Requirements by Location](#). **If you are still unsure, please contact your Human Resources representative.**

## How effective are flu vaccines, especially since virus strains keep changing?

The flu vaccine is the most effective method to prevent influenza. The effectiveness of the vaccine depends on a number of factors, including the accuracy of the match between vaccine strains and circulating strains and the age and health of the recipient. Influenza vaccine does not protect against other respiratory viral infections that occur during winter months. Public health officials have a good track record of predicting the three main flu strains that will cause the most illness during each flu season. These strains usually change each year, which is why the vaccine is given annually. Even if you get the flu from a strain of the virus that wasn't included in the vaccine, having the vaccine can make your illness milder.

## Why is wearing a mask and doing a better job of hand hygiene not enough to prevent transmission of flu?

HCWs have frequent contacts with high-risk patients in many settings. HCWs can serve as a vehicle to transmit influenza even when they don't have symptoms. Up to 25 percent of HCW with the flu may have minimal or no symptoms yet can still transmit infection. Studies have found that HCW with influenza-like

symptoms work an average of 2.5 days while ill and those infected with influenza can transmit the virus to others even before their symptoms begin.

Additionally, their absenteeism can stress a health care facility or system. Research shows that influenza vaccination of HCWs decreases patient mortality by 40 to 50 percent, risk of nosocomial infection by 43 percent and absenteeism by 20 to 30 percent, while limiting the risk of bringing illness acquired at work home to family members. We are not able to ensure compliance with masking or hand hygiene and thus these measures are not considered to be as reliable as vaccination in protecting our patients.

### **Why can't vaccination be voluntary?**

Our highest priority must be to protect our patients, (many of whom are vulnerable to adverse outcomes) and the employees who serve them. Research clearly shows that flu vaccinations vastly increase mass immunity and protect immune-suppressed patients.

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## **Importance of Being Vaccinated**

### **I'm not involved in direct patient care. Why should I be vaccinated?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the vaccine for all persons over the age of 6 months, especially HCWs. Everyone, including laboratory, clerical, dietary and housekeeping employees as well as security, facilities, maintenance and administrative personnel might be exposed to the flu virus even though they are not directly involved in patient care, and could transmit the virus to others.

### **I'm very healthy and never get the flu. Why should I get the flu vaccine?**

Working in a health care environment increases your risk of exposure. You may become infected and experience only mild symptoms but still pass the virus to patients, co-workers and members of your family.

### **I'm very familiar with the symptoms of the flu, and I stay home when I am sick. So, there is very little chance that I would infect my co-workers or patients. Why should I get the vaccine?**

The signs and symptoms of the flu may not appear for two to three days after you contract influenza, during which time you could unknowingly infect patients and co-workers.

### **Can't I just take antiviral drugs if I get the flu?**

It is best to take precautions to prevent the flu with annual immunization. You can always seek treatment for the flu, but in the meantime, you may have already passed on the virus to patients and co-workers since viral shedding may occur up to two to three days prior to the appearance of symptoms. Also, resistance to antiviral drugs can develop in circulating virus strains, therefore compromising the effectiveness of the drugs for people who need them the most—those at high risk for severe complications.

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## About the Vaccine

### When should I be vaccinated?

When the flu season is about to begin, you should get the vaccine as soon as possible. It takes about two weeks to develop protection after receiving the vaccine. Check with your local Employee Health office for information about flu vaccination, including locations and times.

### If I get the seasonal flu vaccine in the fall, will I still be protected if the flu season continues into March or April?

Yes. Protection from the particular strains included in the vaccine will last for the duration of the flu season.

### Is it true that you can get the flu from the flu vaccine?

No, you cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine. The viruses in the vaccine are either killed (as is the case with the shot) or weakened (as is the case with the nasal spray) so that they cannot cause the flu. Some people mistakenly confuse flu symptoms with the vaccine side effects, such as a minor fever.

### Will the flu vaccine make me feel ill?

Almost all people who receive the influenza vaccine have no serious problems. Some people may experience minor side effects. If these problems occur, they begin soon after the shot is given and usually last no more than one to two days. The most common side effects are:

- Soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given
- Low-grade fever and aches
- Runny nose, sore throat, cough and headache (nasal mist only)

Any HCW who believes that they are experiencing adverse effects related to the Flu vaccination should contact University of Miami Workman's Compensation Office-

Phone: 305-689- 2667

Hours: Mon – Friday 7am – 5pm

Located at University of Miami Hospital

West Building, Suite 502

1321 NW 14th ST

Miami FL 33125

Website: <http://www.uhealthworkerscomp.com>

### I have an allergy to eggs. Should I get the flu vaccine?

[Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#) recommends people who experienced only hives after exposure to egg can get any licensed flu vaccine that is appropriate for their age and health. People who have symptoms other than hives after exposure to eggs such as angioedema ,respiratory distress, lightheadedness, or recurrent emesis or who have needed epinephrine or another emergency care intervention ,also can receive any licensed flu vaccine which appropriate for age and health, but vaccine should be given in a medical setting and supervised by a health care provider who is able to recognize and manage severe allergic reactions, Settings include hospitals, clinics, health departments, and other

physicians office. People with egg allergies no longer need to wait 30 minutes after receiving the vaccine.

**I am pregnant. Should I get the flu vaccine?**

Yes. Pregnant women should receive the flu shot. It is especially important for pregnant women to get the flu shot as you are more likely to have serious complications to yourself and your pregnancy if you get the flu. Once you get the flu shot, your body will start producing antibodies that will help protect you against the flu, and this protection can be passed to your unborn baby. According to the CDC, you can receive the flu shot at any time, during any trimester, while you are pregnant. Pregnant women should receive the injectable vaccine. The nasal spray is only for use in healthy people 2 to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

**I have heard there are other types of flu vaccine, such as the high dose vaccine, the intradermal vaccine and the quadrivalent vaccine. Do these alternatives offer me more protection than the trivalent vaccine?**

CDC recommends flu vaccination as the first and most important step in protecting against the flu and has not expressed a preference for one vaccine over another for HCW. **UHealth is offering the quadrivalent, egg free, and intradermal vaccine.**

**What if I get vaccinated on my own through my doctor's office or another location other than at University of Miami Medical Campus?**

That is acceptable. If you receive the vaccine elsewhere, please provide documentation to Employee Health.

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## Exemptions

**What about an individual who has medical or religious reasons for declining vaccination?**

An exemption to the vaccination policy may be requested for certain medical reasons, including documentation of severe allergy to the vaccine or components as defined by the most current recommendations of the [CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices \(ACIP\)](#).

Likewise, if receiving the vaccination conflicts with sincerely held beliefs, a request for religious accommodation may be made.

**What documentation do I need to provide to request a medical exemption?**

There are very few medical contraindications to receiving the flu vaccine. However, a HCW may apply for a medical exemption if he or she believes a vaccine would cause serious harm (e.g., if he or she has a documented history of a serious reaction to a previous flu vaccine). The HCW must have his or her physician complete the UHealth Medical Exemption form and the HCW is responsible for requesting and returning the completed form to Sandra Chen-Walta, ARNP in the Employee Health Office at [flu@miami.edu](mailto:flu@miami.edu).

### **My religion requires me to decline vaccination. What should I do?**

A HCW whose religion prohibits vaccinations may apply for an exemption. A HCW seeking a religious exemption must submit the completed form, along with any supporting documentation, to Roy Hinds in the HR Department of Workforce Equity and Performance at [wep@miami.edu](mailto:wep@miami.edu). Supporting documentation is any documentation that supports the worker's belief that religion prohibits him or her from obtaining the flu vaccine. Examples of supporting documentation are a letter from a religious leader or a quote from a religious text along with a letter from the HCW explaining the relevance of the text and/or a sworn affidavit confirming that the worker has never exposed him/herself to any vaccinations.

### **I received a medical exemption last year. Do I have to submit the paperwork again this year?**

If you received a "permanent" exemption, you are not required to apply again this year. If you received a "temporary" exemption, you are required to reapply for a medical exemption and email it to [flu@miami.edu](mailto:flu@miami.edu) prior to the deadline of October 27, 2017.

### **I received a RELIGIOUS I exemption last year. Do I have to submit the paperwork again this year?**

Yes. If you received a Religious exemption last year, you are required to submit a NEW application this flu season to [wep@miami.edu](mailto:wep@miami.edu) prior to the deadline of October 27, 2017.

### **If my declination for medical or religious reasons is approved, will I still be able to work?**

Yes. Unlike previous Flu seasons, you will not be required to wear a mask because you did not receive your flu vaccine. However, if you are ill with the flu, you should NOT provide care or have contact with patients. Also, all caregivers, regardless of vaccination status, should wear a mask if they have respiratory symptoms when they are taking care of a patient.

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## **Compliance**

### **What happens if I don't want to get the vaccine?**

MSOM health care workers (HCWs) who do not receive the vaccine by publicized deadline or who do not have an approved exemption (medical or religious) will be placed on a 7-day unpaid leave (those with available vacation time must use vacation pay during the leave). During this time, the HCW will have access to additional educational information regarding prevention of influenza, and will have the opportunity to be vaccinated at any point during the 7-day leave. This is a disciplinary matter which will be recorded in the employee's file.

HCWs who do not obtain the flu vaccine by **November 17, 2017** will be precluded from accessing any area where patient care is provided and from providing patient care and will be disciplined up to and including termination (Faculty will be disciplined pursuant to the terms of the Faculty Manual).

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## **Support for Required Vaccination**

### **What other institutions/health systems have required influenza vaccination among health care personnel?**

- State of Rhode Island
- MedStar (Baltimore and elsewhere)

- 38 of the 46 hospitals in the state of Maryland (with four more adopting policies for 2013-2014)
- Virginia Mason, Seattle, Wash.
- University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.
- Barnes-Jewish Hospital/Washington University, St. Louis, Mo.
- Baptist Hospital/Wake Forest University, Winston Salem, N.C.
- Emory University, Atlanta, Ga.
- Creighton University, Omaha, Neb.
- University of Iowa Hospital and Clinics (Iowa City)
- Loyola University Hospital (Chicago, Ill.)
- Multiple HCA hospitals
- Most hospitals in the state of Michigan including University of Michigan and Michigan State

**What professional associations support required influenza vaccination among health care personnel?**

- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American College of Physicians
- American Hospital Association
- American Medical Directors Association
- American Pharmacists Association
- American Public Health Association
- Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology
- Infectious Diseases Society of America
- National Foundation for Infectious Diseases
- National Patient Safety Foundation
- Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America

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## **More Information**

**Where can I get more information about the flu vaccine?**

You can find more information on the flu vaccine at [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)