



## SIMPLE CHANGES THAT MAKE A BIG IMPACT: FLU SHOTS

***“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” – Benjamin Franklin***

As summer comes to an end and cooler weather settles in, it's important to take preventative action against the seasonal flu. The virus can spread easily through schools, workplaces, communities and homes if the proper precautionary steps are not taken. Getting a flu shot this fall will benefit not only you and your family, but also your co-workers. Businesses should share this information with employees to help cultivate a work environment where small changes can make a big impact.

### What is the flu and how is it spread?

- Influenza, the virus commonly known as the flu, is a contagious respiratory infection that affects the nose, throat and lungs<sup>i</sup>.
- The infection is spread through coughing, sneezing, kissing, shaking hands, etc., and can be spread from a distance of up to six feet.<sup>ii</sup>
- Influenza is also known as the seasonal flu, since most cases occur during the winter months, but flu activity can start as early as October and continue as late as May.<sup>iii</sup>
- Your annual flu shot will protect you for one flu season.<sup>iv</sup>

### Why are flu shots so important?

- Every year, on average, between 5-20% of Americans contract the flu.
- Not only do flu shots keep you from getting sick, the vaccinations can help protect those around you who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness, including children, pregnant women and the elderly.<sup>v</sup>
- If you do get the flu, the vaccine may help reduce the risk of more serious flu outcomes, like hospitalization and death.<sup>vi</sup>
- One study showed that the flu vaccination was associated with a 71% reduction in flu-related hospitalizations among adults of all ages and a 77% reduction among adults 50 years of age and older during the 2011-2012 flu season.<sup>vii</sup>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that influenza costs \$6.2 billion in lost productivity, not to mention \$10.4 billion in direct medical costs. Factoring in work absences and other variables, the total estimated economic burden is \$87.1 billion.<sup>viii</sup>
- Among adults 18-64 years of age, influenza causes the following each year:
  - 200 million days of diminished productivity;
  - 100 million days of bed disability;
  - 75 million days of work absences; and
  - 22 million visits to health care providers.<sup>ix</sup>
- Since the influenza virus mutates over time, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases recommends an annual flu shot. Doing so will ensure that you receive the vaccine developed to combat the strain circulating that year.<sup>x</sup>

### Other ways to boost your immune system:

While an annual flu shot can keep you healthier, there are other ways to boost your immune system for better well-being. Here are some tips:

- Avoid smoking at all costs



- Exercise regularly
- Get adequate sleep each night
- Eat a diet high in fruits, vegetables and whole grains
- Wash hands completely and frequently<sup>xi</sup>

### Using this information in the workplace:

#### Low cost or no cost

Employers can implement multiple initiatives to prevent the flu and protect workers and reduce the transmission of the seasonal flu virus in the workplace, such as:

- Promoting and/or providing vaccination
- Encouraging sick workers to stay home
- Promoting hand hygiene and cough etiquette
- Keeping the workplace clean
- Addressing travel concerns<sup>xii</sup>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers a free PDF toolkit for businesses and employers, titled "Make It Your Business to Fight the Flu." You can find this toolkit at:

[http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/business/toolkit\\_seasonal\\_flu\\_for\\_businesses\\_and\\_employers.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/business/toolkit_seasonal_flu_for_businesses_and_employers.pdf)

Educate employees by addressing common flu shot myths:

- "I've never had a shot and never got the flu, so why should I get one now?"
- "I've heard you can get the flu from the flu shot."
- "I'm really healthy and don't need a flu shot."
- "I've heard I can have serious side effects as a result of getting a flu shot."
- "It's too late to get a flu shot."

For the real answers to these myths, visit:

<http://www.shrm.org/hrdisciplines/safetysecurity/articles/pages/ready-workplace-flu-season.aspx#sthash.JDRhQSy5.dpuf>

Link to a poster titled "Everyday Actions That Can Help Fight Germs, Like Flu":

[http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/updated/everyday\\_preventive.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/freeresources/updated/everyday_preventive.pdf)

Poster on coughing etiquette:

[http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/protect/cdc\\_cough.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/pdf/protect/cdc_cough.pdf)

Posters on hand washing:

- 1) [http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=1916](http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1916)
- 2) <http://www.who.int/gpsc/tools/GPSC-HandRub-Wash.pdf>

### Planning your process:

*Step 1 – Identify champion – Who in the organization is going to spearhead the flu shot initiative?*

*Step 2 – Determine communication strategy – Which communication methods will you use to promote flu vaccines?*



*Step 3 – Develop implementation methodology – Consider the logistics of this initiative. Are you going to have a vendor provide flu shots for employees or incentivize them to get vaccinated on-site? If you’re providing shots to employees: when will you have them, how long do you need and in what space will you give them? If you’re going to incentivize employees to go off-site, will you allow them to do this during work hours?*

*Step 4 – Execute plan*

*Step 5 – Evaluate – How many people in your organization received their flu shot? How can you modify the program so there is more participation in the future? Talk to employees and see what they thought of the initiative.*

*Step 6 – Celebrate success – Recognize and reward the employees who took preventative action against the flu, when possible.*

For more information on this topic, or suggestions on potential speakers to bring into your organization, contact the Wellness Council of Indiana Helpline at (317) 264-2168. Stay tuned for more ***Simple Changes that Make a Big Impact.***

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<sup>i</sup> “Flu (Influenza) Overview.” National Institute of Allergy and Infection Diseases, Nov. 2012. Web.

<sup>ii</sup> “Influenza (Flu).” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d. Web. <<http://www.vaccines.gov/diseases/flu/>>.

<sup>iii</sup> “Influenza (Flu).” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d. Web. <<http://www.vaccines.gov/diseases/flu/>>.

<sup>iv</sup> “Vaccination & Vaccine Safety.” U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d. Web. <<http://www.flu.gov/prevention-vaccination/vaccination/index.html>>.

<sup>v</sup> “Vaccine Effectiveness - How Well Does the Flu Vaccine Work?” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d. Web.

<sup>vi</sup> “Vaccine Effectiveness - How Well Does the Flu Vaccine Work?” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d. Web.

<sup>vii</sup> Talbot, H. K., Y. Zhu, Q. Chen, J. V. Williams, M. G. Thompson, and M. R. Griffin. “Effectiveness of Influenza Vaccine for Preventing Laboratory-confirmed Influenza Hospitalizations in Adults, 2011-2012 Influenza Season.” *Clinical Infectious Diseases* 56.12 (2013): 1774-777. Web.

<sup>viii</sup> Molinari, N. A., I. R. Ortega-Sanchez, M. L. Messonnier, W. W. Thompson, P. M. Wortley, E. Weintaub, and C. B. Bridges. “The Annual Impact of Seasonal Influenza in the US: Measuring Disease Burden and Costs.” *Vaccine* 25.27 (2007): 5086-096. Web.

<sup>ix</sup> Nichol, K. L. “Cost-benefit Analysis of a Strategy to Vaccinate Healthy Working Adults against Influenza.” *Cost-benefit Analysis of a Strategy to Vaccinate Healthy Working Adults against Influenza*. 161.5 (2001): 749-59. Web.

<sup>x</sup> “Influenza (Flu).” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d. Web. <<http://www.vaccines.gov/diseases/flu/>>.

<sup>xi</sup> “How to Boost Your Immune System.” Harvard Health Publications: Harvard Medical School, n.d. Web. <<http://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/how-to-boost-your-immune-system>>.

<sup>xii</sup> “Employer Guidance: Reducing All Workers' Exposures to Seasonal Flu Virus.” U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety & Health Administration, n.d. Web. <<https://www.osha.gov/dts/guidance/flu/nonhealthcare.html>>.