FLU VACCINATION - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

SEASONAL FLU VACCINATION 2015–2016

As a health care worker, am I required to be vaccinated against influenza (the flu)?

It is not mandatory to be vaccinated against the flu. However, participation in the NYP Flu Vaccination Program is mandatory. The New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH) is requiring any health care worker who declines the vaccination to wear a surgical mask while in areas where patients are typically present. All physicians, employees and volunteers are required to decide whether to be vaccinated and to document the decision by November 20, 2015.

Where can I get the flu vaccine?

Workforce Health & Safety is providing the seasonal flu vaccine free of charge to all employees, physicians and volunteers. You may get vaccinated at all WH&S clinic locations, from a Flu Champion on the units, and in central locations throughout the Hospital such as cafeterias and lobbies.

Why is the NYS DOH requiring masking for unvaccinated health care workers?

The masking requirement is intended to protect patients from acquiring influenza from infected health care workers. Influenza can be severe and cause death in persons with underlying medical conditions. There is a large body of evidence that health care workers can pose a risk to patients by transmitting influenza infection.

What is the policy regarding wearing a surgical mask if I decide not to be vaccinated?

- The NYS DOH requires any health care worker who declines the influenza vaccination to wear a surgical mask while in areas where patients are typically present. These areas include all inpatient and outpatient locations including lobbies, elevators, corridors, cafeterias (except while the unvaccinated employee is eating), gift shops, common areas, and any other location where patients are typically present.

- Surgical masks will be available at all Hospital entry areas and in clinical areas.

  Masks should be changed after leaving the room or completing the care of a patient on isolation precautions, whenever it is soiled or might have become soiled, or if it becomes moist.
N-95 masks are not needed to comply with this policy and should not be used for this purpose.

**What will happen to an unvaccinated employee who refuses to wear a mask?**

Compliance with this policy is mandatory, and non-compliance will result in corrective action. Managerial and Security staff will monitor mask use in the designated areas.

**What date will I be required to wear a mask if I decline the vaccine?**

The required date for “masks on,” or when the masks must be worn, will be determined by the NYS DOH Commissioner based on regional flu activity.

The NYS DOH will also determine the date for “masks off,” or when masks no longer need to be worn.

**How will the Hospital identify whether or not someone is vaccinated?**

When an employee is vaccinated, he/she will be given a sticker to wear on his/her ID. Employees who choose not to be vaccinated will be required to wear a surgical mask in any location where patients are typically present.

**Do I need to do anything else if I decide to decline vaccination?**

In addition to wearing a surgical mask, you will also be required to complete a 15-minute online educational course about influenza through the [NYP Learning Center](#) to help you make an informed decision on whether or not to be vaccinated. If you still wish to decline the vaccination after completing the course, you must print out the certificate of completion and bring it to Workforce Health & Safety (WH&S). You will be given a declination form to complete, which documents your decision to decline the vaccine, the reasons(s) for your declination, and agreement to wear a surgical mask in areas where patients may be present.

If you do not have computer access, you will be given a timed educational pamphlet in WH&S that you must read. If you still wish to decline after reading the pamphlet, you must complete a declination form that documents your decision to decline the vaccine, the reasons(s) for your declination, and agreement to wear a surgical mask in areas where patients may be present.

**If I decline vaccination and work in a non-clinical area where there are no patients, do I have to wear a surgical mask?**

Employees in geographically isolated non-clinical locations where patients do not go are exempt from the mask requirement. Click [Masks-Off Areas](#) for a list of locations. However,
these employees must don a mask if they go to hospital buildings and other areas where patients are typically present.

**What should I do if I have a medical contraindication to the flu vaccine?**

Employees with a medical contraindication to the vaccine must provide documentation to WH&S and will be required to wear a surgical mask during the “masks on” period determined by the NYS DOH. Medical contraindications are one of the following:

- severe allergy to chicken eggs
- history of severe reaction to flu vaccine in the past
- history of having had Guillain-Barre syndrome within 6 weeks of having received the flu vaccine

This documentation will be reviewed by WH&S. WHS can refer you for allergy testing if needed. Many people who have a history of egg allergy in childhood can safely receive the flu vaccine. This will be determined by an allergist.

**If I received the flu vaccine somewhere other than Workforce Health & Safety, do I need to do anything?**

If you were vaccinated for influenza elsewhere, you are required to notify WH&S of outside vaccination by submitting official documentation that includes the name and signature of the licensed healthcare practitioner who administered the vaccine, the date of vaccination, specific vaccine formulation and its dose that was administered. Click [Influenza Vaccine Outside Documentation](#) to link to the outside documentation form, which can be brought to WHS to receive a sticker for your ID.

**If a person did not receive an influenza vaccine but already had influenza this influenza season, is that person still required to wear a mask?**

Yes. Influenza vaccines generally contain three strains of influenza virus. A person would have to have had influenza three times during the current season, once with each strain, and have all three illnesses confirmed by a healthcare provider and strains confirmed by a laboratory, in order for the influenza vaccine to provide no additional protection. Therefore, personnel should wear masks regardless of whether they have had influenza during the current influenza season.

**It takes one to two weeks after vaccination to develop protective immunity. Do I need to wear a mask during this period?**

Not under the requirements of this regulation. Personnel are encouraged to become vaccinated well before influenza season is expected to start to avoid this problem.
Do staff members who routinely interact with personnel who could potentially expose patients to influenza but who don't meet such criteria themselves need to wear a mask?

No. The requirement only applies to personnel who could directly expose patients.

**Why do I need to be vaccinated for the flu every year?**

A flu vaccine is needed every year because flu viruses are constantly changing and it is not unusual for new flu viruses to appear each year. The flu vaccine is formulated each year to keep up with the flu viruses as they change. Also, studies have shown that the body’s immunity to influenza viruses either through natural infection or vaccination declines over time. Getting vaccinated each year provides the best protection against influenza throughout flu season.

**Is the flu vaccine safe?**

Yes. The flu vaccine is made from inactive virus, so you cannot get the flu from being vaccinated. Side effects, when they occur, are generally mild and may include arm soreness or mild fever for one to two days. Allergic reactions and other complications are very rare.

**Can I receive the intranasal vaccine, FluMist®, for seasonal flu instead of an injection?**

Yes, FluMist® is the intranasal form of seasonal flu vaccine, and is available at Workforce Health & Safety. However, if you are older than 49, have certain medical conditions, work with severely immunocompromised patients requiring a protected environment, such as bone marrow transplant patients, or if you have a medical contraindication, you should not receive FluMist®. Workforce Health & Safety can determine if you can safely receive FluMist®.

**Will the Hospital be offering the new intradermal flu vaccine with the smaller needle or the high dose flu vaccine?**

Due to the limited supplies of the intradermal flu vaccine, it will not be offered at the Hospital during this flu season but may be in the future. The high dose flu vaccine for those >65 years old may become available this season depending on its supply.

**Will the Hospital insurance plan cover the cost of flu shots for family members?**

Family members of NYP employees who participate in the Empire BlueCross BlueShield EPO, POS and PPO plans can present their card and receive the flu shot with no co-pay at:

- Their primary care doctor’s office, if part of a wellness visit
- A participating pharmacy
However, if the flu shot is administered at a network primary care doctor’s office and is not part of a wellness visit, the normal co-pay for the office visit will apply.

**IF YOU DEVELOP FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS**

*What are the symptoms of developing flu?*

Generally, the symptoms are a fever of greater than 100°F (37.8°C), plus a cough or sore throat. Fatigue and body aches are also common. Influenza may also present as pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), or respiratory distress.

*If I only have mild symptoms, can I still report to or remain at work?*

No. Influenza is very contagious, and if you work while you are sick there is a high risk that patients and co-workers will be exposed.

*What should I do if I develop flu-like symptoms at work?*

You should immediately put on a surgical mask, report to your manager or supervisor, and go to Workforce Health & Safety (WH&S) for evaluation. After the evaluation, which may include laboratory tests and medications, WH&S will place you off duty and you will be sent home. You should call your personal physician if you are concerned about symptoms.

*What happens if I develop flu-like symptoms at work and Workforce Health & Safety is closed during my shift?*

You should immediately put on a surgical mask and report to your manager, who will send you home. You are required to call WH&S the next business day, to provide symptom checks and direction. Follow your departmental procedure for notification in the event of absence from work. If you are concerned about your symptoms, call your personal physician.

*What should I do if I develop flu-like symptoms while I am not at work?*

Call your manager, who will instruct you to stay home and call WH&S to provide symptom checks and receive direction. Follow your departmental procedure for notification in the event of absence from work. If you are concerned about your symptoms, call your personal physician.

*Is there a procedure I should follow when I am ready to return to work?*

All employees recovered from influenza must be cleared by WH&S before returning to work, regardless of the number of days they were out sick.
**What should I do if I am exposed to influenza?**

If you are **at work** and exposed to influenza, inform your manager, who will notify Infection Prevention & Control. They will determine if it is an exposure that places you at risk and get back to your manager. If it is a true exposure, you will receive direction on what to do next.

If you are **outside of work** and exposed to influenza, consult your physician or Workforce Health & Safety. Exposed employees may continue working as long as they remain symptom-free.

**If I develop influenza and am prescribed Tamiflu, is this medication covered under a prescription plan?**

For NYP employees participating in the Caremark prescription plan, Tamiflu is available with a co-pay of $10. You can obtain a prescription from your primary care doctor or Workforce Health & Safety.

**FURTHER QUESTIONS:** e-mail fluquestions@nyp.org