



PREVENTION OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE BIG SKY

INFLUENZA VACCINATION FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS — ARE YOU UP TO DATE?

If healthcare workers (HCW) could take a simple, inexpensive, readily available step once each year that would cut their risk for infection, decrease absenteeism, and reduce deaths in their patients---would almost all HCW take that step? Not yet! An annual influenza vaccination for HCW does provide these advantages, but in the U.S. during the 2010-2011 influenza season about one-third of HCW did not take this important prevention step.¹ This issue of *Montana Public Health* emphasizes the importance of influenza vaccination in HCW, and strategies for increasing the influenza vaccination rate as well as the vaccination rate for other recommended vaccines for HCW.

Influenza vaccination coverage among HCW

Influenza vaccination is the single most effective means of protecting patients and employees from influenza. Although many professional organizations, including the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee recommend annual influenza vaccination for HCW,² overall coverage among HCW remains below the *Healthy People 2020* target of 90%. In the United States, during the 2010–2011 influenza season, the overall immunization coverage rate for HCW was estimated to be only 63.5%.¹ Coverage was highest among physicians, dentists, nurse practitioners and physician assistants, and HCW in hospital settings. (Figure)

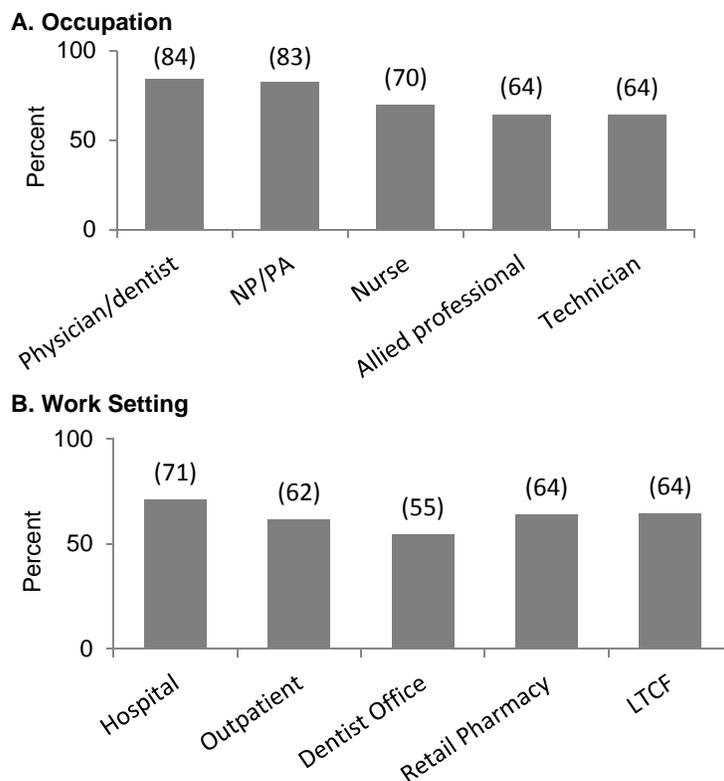
In Montana the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) surveys long term care facilities (LTCF) each year to monitor the influenza vaccination coverage levels in HCW as well as patients in these facilities. No similar survey is conducted for hospital or other health care settings in Montana. Since 2006 the influenza vaccination level for HCW in LTCF has ranged from 61% to 65%; during 2010-2011 influenza season it was 65%.

Strategies to increase vaccination coverage When employers require influenza vaccination as a condition of employment self-reported influenza vaccination coverage in HCW is high (one estimate was 98%).¹ In the absence of such a requirement, several strategies have been associated with higher coverage levels. When an employer in a health care setting sends a personal reminder to each HCW, the resulting vaccination coverage rate has been higher---in one assessment 70% versus 60%.¹ Notably, higher influenza vaccination coverage rates have been achieved when employers provide vaccination onsite, free-of-charge (68% versus 41%), and for more than one day (69% versus 41%).¹

Because unvaccinated HCW were more likely to question whether vaccination was worth the time and cost, and whether vaccination would protect HCW and patients, efforts to educate HCW (and patients) about vaccine effectiveness should be emphasized.

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations requires facilities seeking accreditation to offer onsite influenza vaccination to HCW, including licensed independent practitioners and volunteers.³ The Commission also requires annual monitoring of vaccination rates and reasons for nonparticipation.

Figure. Influenza vaccination coverage in HCW, by occupation and work setting, U.S., 2010–2011



The DPHHS strongly encourages all employers of health care personnel to adopt the strategies mentioned above and offer onsite vaccination clinics for their employees, free of charge when possible, and for more than one day and during multiple shifts.

Additional recommended vaccinations for healthcare personnel In addition to influenza vaccine, other vaccines are recommended for HCW. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and ACIP

also recommend that HCW be immunized against hepatitis B, MMR (measles, mumps, rubella), and varicella (chickenpox) as well as Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis) and other adult vaccines appropriate to a HCW's age or medical condition.⁴ Posters to encourage HCW vaccination are available at:

http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/downloads/f_hcp_color_print.pdf.

Recommendations to Increase the Influenza Vaccination Coverage of Healthcare Workers⁵

- EDUCATE HCW regarding the benefits of influenza vaccination and the potential health consequences of influenza illness for themselves and their patients.
- OFFER influenza vaccine ANNUALLY to all eligible HCW to protect staff, patients, and family members and to decrease HCW absenteeism.
- PROVIDE influenza vaccination to HCW at the work site and at no cost as one component of an employee health program.
- OBTAIN a signed declination from HCW who declines influenza vaccination for reasons other than medical contraindications.
- MONITOR HCW influenza vaccination coverage and declination at regular intervals during influenza season and provide feedback of ward-, unit-, and specialty-specific rates to staff and administration.
- USE the level of HCW influenza vaccination coverage as one measure of an effective patient safety quality program.
- GET VACCINATED

For more information, contact the DPHHS Immunization Program at 406-444-5580.

References:

1. CDC. Influenza vaccination coverage among health-care personnel – United States, 2010-2011 Influenza Season, MMWR 2011; 60: 1073-1077.
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3. <http://www.jointcommission.org/about/JointCommissionFaq.aspx?CategoryId=32#613>.
4. CDC Immunization of Health-Care Workers: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the Hospital Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee (HICPAC) MMWR 1997; 46(RR-18): 1-42.
5. CDC. Influenza vaccination of health-care personnel. Recommendations of the Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee (HICPAC) and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), MMWR 2006; 55(RR-02): 1-16.

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1400 Broadway
Helena, MT 59620-2951

Anna Whiting Sorrell, Director, DPHHS
Steven Helgerson, MD, MPH, State Med. Officer
Jane Smilie, MPH, Administrator, PHSD