



Mandatory Influenza Vaccination:

A Team Member and Patient Safety Imperative

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we mandate the flu vaccine?

One of the fundamental tenets of health care is to care for patients while protecting ourselves from harm. CDC recommends an annual flu vaccine as the first and best way to protect against influenza. This recommendation is the same even during years when the vaccine composition (the viruses the vaccine protects against) remains unchanged from the previous season.

During the 2017-2018 Flu Season, CDC estimated Flu caused 49 million illnesses, 960,000 hospitalizations and 79,000 deaths. Approximately 40% of the U.S. population was vaccinated during this same season and this **prevented** an estimated 7 million illnesses, 109,000 hospitalizations, and 8,000 deaths.

Requiring an annual flu vaccine demonstrates HMM's commitment to protect the safety and health of our patients, many of whom already have weakened immune systems, as well as visitors, families and selves. Vaccination for health care personnel has been recommended for years, yet vaccination rates remain low nationally. At HMM, rates have increased over the years, but we have not achieved 100 percent despite significant efforts.

Who does this apply to?

The mandatory influenza vaccination program applies to any facility owned, leased, managed and/or operated by HMM and **all**:

- 1) Active Employed Team Members of all status both clinical and non-clinical
- 2) Active Non-Employed/Third Party Staff defined as anyone issued an HMM permanent or temporary Id badge. Individuals included are those authorized to work and/or observe work within and on behalf of HMM, whether paid or unpaid, but not employed by HMM. This definition includes both clinical and non-clinical workers, physicians, licensed independent practitioners, members of the professional staff (as defined by the MEC), temporary workers, contracted and subcontracted workers, students, researchers, adult volunteers, clergy, representatives from pharmaceutical or other organizations (that would be identified through the Vendormate or other vendor management system) and agency personnel.



Why can't HMH allow us to decline vaccination, continue with mandatory masking and enforce hand hygiene to prevent transmission of flu?

Health care personnel have frequent contacts with high-risk patients in many settings, including the elevators and cafeteria. They can serve as a vehicle to transmit influenza even when they don't have symptoms. Up to 25 percent of health care personnel with the flu may have minimal or no symptoms yet can still transmit infection. Studies have found that health care personnel 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.

Research shows that influenza vaccination of health care personnel 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.

I'm not involved in direct patient care. Why do I have to be vaccinated?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the vaccine for all persons over the age of 6 months, especially health care workers. Everyone, including laboratory, clerical, dietary and housekeeping, 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 a day or two 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 because viral shedding may occur up to two to three days prior to symptom initiation. 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.



When will free flu vaccinations be available?

The Flu Surveillance teams/Occupational Health will provide free flu vaccinations to team members, employed physicians, Licensed Independent Practitioners (MD, DO, NP, PA) and adult volunteers starting on **October 1**. It takes about two weeks to develop protection after receiving the vaccine.

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.

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 is given
- Low-grade fever and aches

Team members who believe that they are experiencing adverse effects related to the vaccination should contact Occupational Health.

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 because they are more likely to have serious complications to themselves and their pregnancy if they get the flu. Once they get the flu shot, they will start producing antibodies that will help protect against the flu, and



this protection can be passed to their unborn baby. According to the CDC, they can receive the flu shot at any time, during any trimester, while they are pregnant.

What if I get vaccinated on my own through my doctor's office or another location other than an HMH facility?

That is acceptable. If you receive the vaccine elsewhere, please provide documentation to Occupational Health by December 1st. Volunteers are required to **present** this proof to any HMH Volunteer Office.

What do I do if I get sick with the Flu?

Do not come to work if you are sick with the flu. Follow the standard call out policy but also notify your Occupational Health office. If you get sick at work stop, put on a mask, notify your supervisor before leaving work. Your leader will notify Infection Control. Common symptoms of the flu include fever, respiratory symptoms, cough, body aches & headache. You cannot work until cleared by Occupational Health, despite having a clearance from your personal health care provider. You cannot be cleared to return to work until you no longer have a fever for at least 24 hrs. (without the use of fever reducing medication).

What do I do if I am exposed to the Flu at work or at home?

If exposed at work, contact your leader who will assist you with documenting the exposure details per your facility policy. Contact the Occupational Health office for an exposure assessment and follow up.

For non-work related exposures, it is required that a team member diagnosed with, or exposed to a communicable disease, must notify their department leader/supervisor and Occupational Health. Prior to returning to work, the team member is required to be evaluated by Occupational Health and deemed no longer communicable or infectious to receive clearance to return to work.

Call Occupational Health to discuss the exposure.

Where can I find the flu vaccination schedules?

Team members may access flu vaccination schedules by visiting the **Occupational Health Center** at: <https://teamhmh.com/occupational-health-center/>

What can I expect when I get my flu vaccination?

You will need to bring your Hackensack Meridian *Health*-issued photo ID badge with you. You will also be required to answer a few questions and sign consent to be vaccinated.

PLEASE NOTE: There may be other team members on line to get their flu vaccines, so your patience is appreciated. The Flu Surveillance Team/Occupational Health is administering thousands of vaccines to team



members throughout the network and they try to make the experience a positive one for each and every team member. Please act in a courteous manner towards the vaccinator and remember why our flu policy was implemented: to help prevent the spread of seasonal flu to our patients, guests and each other.

What happens if I have an egg allergy? Can I still be vaccinated?

Please contact the Occupational Health office closest to your work location for a consultation appointment to discuss other options.

What should I do if I get a flu vaccination outside of Hackensack Meridian Health?

Team Members provide Occupational Health and Non-Employed Medical Staff/Licensed Independent Practitioners provide their Primary Medical Staff Office with proof of vaccination. Occupational Health and the Medical Staff Offices uses this documentation to report flu vaccination compliance. Please see the Influenza Policy for more details.

How do I get the flu marker for my photo ID badge that indicates I had my flu vaccine? After you receive your vaccination from the Flu Surveillance Team/Occupational Health, the administering nurse will put the flu marker on your badge. If you receive your vaccination outside a network facility or lose the marker, please contact the Flu Surveillance Team on site or the Occupational Health office closest to your work location.

Should I remove my flu maker from last year?

Yes, please remove your flu marker prior to presenting to be vaccinated this year.

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

An exception 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 \(ACIP\)](#) or a history of Guillain-Barre syndrome within six weeks of an influenza vaccine.

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 an exemption?

Request forms for exemptions must be completed and submitted to Occupational Health by October 1st of each year.

Team Member Exemption & Medical Staff/LIP request forms are available at the **Occupational Health Center** at: <https://teamhnh.com/occupational-health-center/>



Medical Staff/LIP Exemption request forms are also available in Maestro.

A new form must be submitted each year and will be reviewed and acted upon by the HMH Influenza Exemption Committee. The committee will be comprised of members from Occupational Health, VP Infectious Disease/Hospital Epidemiologist, Human Resources, Pastoral Care, Legal, HMH Residential Care and other pertinent departments. Requests for exemptions will be evaluated individually.

How will I be notified if my exemption request is approved?

A Team Member requesting a Medical Exemption will be notified of the Committee's decision by Occupational Health within ten (10) days of receiving all required documentation.

A Team Member requesting a Religious or Sincerely Held Belief Exemption will be notified of the Committee's decision by Human Resources within ten (10) days of receiving all required documentation.

I received an exemption last year. Do I have to submit the paperwork again this year?

Yes. All personnel who have a medical or religious exemption must submit a new request each year by October 1st. Because the composition and availability of flu vaccines changes from year to year, certain allergies or concerns may no longer be relevant.

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

Yes, you must wear a mask if you are within six feet of any patient, work with children or work in peri-operative, medication preparation or sterile processing areas. For many inpatient units, this means you will need to wear a mask for most of your shift. The mask should be worn covering both your mouth and your nose.

Where will the masks be located?

Masks will be available in key common area locations throughout our sites (i.e., team member entrances, etc.). Your department/unit will also have a supply for use. Please check with your leader regarding the location for your specific unit/department.

Will team members eating meals in the cafeteria that are not on company time still be required to wear a mask?

No, we are not expecting team members to wear their masks while eating meals in the cafeteria.

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.



Hackensack
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Flu Prevention FAQs

Where can I get more information about HMH's Influenza Policy?

Please see <https://hackensackumc.policystat.com/policy/6312673/latest/>.



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