

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING A WORKSITE INFLUENZA VACCINATION PROGRAM

Every year, influenza poses a tremendous burden on working adults and the many businesses that employ them, by contributing to absenteeism and lost productivity. A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, showed that employee vaccination programs can reduce absenteeism by 36% and provide a cost saving of medical care and sick leave by over \$46 per vaccinated employee. Another study from researchers at the University of Pittsburgh demonstrates that even greater cost savings can be realized (\$63-\$95 per vaccinated employee) if flu vaccination programs are conducted before December. Consequently, worksite health programs are becoming increasingly popular as employers attempt to boost employee productivity, reduce health care costs and foster a healthy work environment.

The New York City (NYC) Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) encourages all employers to develop an influenza vaccination program that promotes and/or provides influenza vaccinations in the workplace. Below DOHMH has compiled the following information that employers can use. Regardless of which strategy is best for your business, having buy-in and robust support from upper management sends a strong message that influenza vaccination is an important health decision for all employees.

Three ways to promote vaccination for your employees

1. Conduct a Worksite Clinic With Your Employee Health Services Clinic

Businesses with a dedicated onsite health clinic for employees are in a strong position to vaccinate their employees. Take these actions to maximize your potential to keep your employees influenza-free.

- ✓ **Designate** a flu clinic coordinator to promote and motivate staff to get vaccinated.
- ✓ **Purchase** enough vaccine to vaccinate all employees who seek them. Make vaccine easily available by having flexible hours, multiple locations or by bringing the vaccination to employees such as through mobile carts. Consider contracting with community vaccinators to enhance the clinic's capacity and employees' access to vaccination.
- ✓ **Promote** flu vaccination for your employees by placing posters around your building(s) and distributing health education materials.
- ✓ **Publish** an article on the benefits of flu vaccination if there is a company newsletter.

- ✓ **E-mail** an announcement reminding employees to get vaccinated.
- ✓ **Announce** the dates and actions employees will have to take to get vaccinated onsite in all communications with employees, including paper and electronic pay stubs.
- ✓ **Offer** influenza vaccine throughout the season (winter and early spring) or until all of your vaccine supply is gone.

2. If You Do Not Have an Employee Clinic but Want to Vaccinate Your Employees Onsite, These Are Steps You Can Follow to Hold a Successful Flu Vaccination Event

STEP 1- ARRANGE A CLINIC

Designate a Flu Campaign Coordinator: This person or group of people will be responsible for planning and implementing the influenza vaccination program for workers. Designating responsibilities will maximize coordination, and provide the momentum needed to see the clinic through completion and ensure the success of the campaign.

Before you call to arrange the clinic, you should consider the following issues:

- ✓ Who will pay for the immunizations? Will your company pay the costs of holding an influenza immunization clinic? Does your company insurance cover this and, if so, will the agency you hire do the billing directly? If there is no insurance, how will employees pay?
- ✓ Choose the date or dates best suited to your business to hold the flu clinic.
- ✓ Identify a location within your facility or elsewhere to conduct the clinic.
- ✓ Be sure you or the agency providing vaccine has all the materials you need to hold a clinic.
- ✓ Determine how many employees are likely to get vaccinated at the clinic.
- ✓ Determine whether you or the agency will be promoting the clinic and what materials you will need.

Once you have identified the agency to provide the clinic, meet with them to review your needs and their vaccination protocols to ensure your questions are answered on successfully hosting a vaccination clinic.

STEP 2- PROMOTE THE CLINIC

Promoting influenza vaccine at every opportunity and explaining the benefits of vaccination and company policy on influenza prevention can help set the right tone for employee acceptance vaccination a successful flu clinic.

- ✓ Develop a company policy in writing that includes influenza facts, information about the flu vaccine and your company's Influenza Prevention and Illness Policy (sample policy link).
- ✓ Identify a key senior manager (e.g. a CEO) to announce the clinic. Make this person a champion, encouraging employees to get vaccinated (at least two weeks in advance of the date that your clinic is scheduled), and have them kick off the event by getting vaccinated themselves.
- ✓ Use posters and/or pamphlets to promote vaccination. Post them around your building. The following links might help you locate posters and pamphlets:
 - The NYC Health Department has influenza education materials you can use to promote clinics. (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/flu/html/public/posters.shtml>)
 - Links for additional materials from other sources can be found here: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/flu/downloads/pdf/employers/res-employee-vac.pdf>
- ✓ Consider incentives for vaccinations that will encourage people to get vaccinated. Examples of incentives are raffles that give away things such as free lunches, gifts, certificates of appreciation or a day off work for one grand prizewinner. In larger corporations, departments can compete against each other to have the highest percentage of staff vaccinated. Consult with company supervisors to choose prizes that will motivate staff.
- ✓ If there is a company newspaper, e-letter or other system for communication for employees, publish an article on flu vaccination in advance of the clinic, and use other types of communications with employee to remind them of vaccination clinic dates, including email and messages in electronic or paper pay stubs.
- ✓ Send several reminders advertising the clinic in the weeks and days preceding the clinic.
- ✓ Post the flu clinic date(s) around the building including entrances and exits, bathrooms, cafeterias, etc.
- ✓ Set up a registration process so you know how many people will be receiving vaccine, but do not restrict employees who decide to get vaccinated at the last minute.

STEP 3- HOLD THE IMMUNIZATION CLINIC

- ✓ Confirm the clinic date with the agency with whom you have contracted.
- ✓ Work with the vaccinating agency to have employees complete the necessary paperwork that can be done in advance. This will decrease the time needed to vaccinate on the clinic date.
- ✓ Walk through the steps the employees will take to be vaccinated prior to the clinic to develop a smooth workflow plan.
- ✓ Make sure you can accommodate additional people who choose to be vaccinated the day of the clinic.
- ✓ When you have started vaccinating, evaluate the process as it is occurring. Is the workflow of the clinic happening as planned? If it is not, be ready to make adjustments.
- ✓ Get immediate employee feedback on the experience. These may be your champions for next year, if there was a positive experience.
- ✓ Get immediate feedback from the agency that provided the clinic to help evaluate the process and give suggestions for next year.

STEP 4- AFTER THE CLINIC

- ✓ Tally the number of employees that were vaccinated. That is the number to beat at next year's influenza clinic.
- ✓ Communicate to employees with a personal thank you. If it comes from the CEO, all the better.
- ✓ Send a letter to the agency that provided the clinic, or if possible, meet with them to evaluate how the clinic went.
- ✓ Begin thinking about what changes you will make for next year.
- ✓ Congratulate yourself for improving the quality of the workplace and your employees' health.

3. Promote Getting Flu Vaccination Elsewhere

Some business may not be able to offer influenza vaccinations to their employees at the worksite. You can make sure your employees know where they and their family can get vaccinated for influenza by promoting flu vaccination.

- ✓ If your employees have health insurance that covers vaccination, remind them they can go to their doctors or pharmacies to receive flu vaccine. Many pharmacies are offering flu vaccination throughout the city, and most accept many insurance plans.
- ✓ Your company can also contact local pharmacies or providers to arrange for your employees vaccinated and give employees limited time off work to get their flu vaccine.
- ✓ You can download vaccine educational materials from to promote vaccination
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/flu/html/public/posters.shtml>
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/flu/downloads/pdf/employers/res-employee-vac.pdf>
- ✓ Businesses and employees can find information on where to find flu vaccination clinics in their area by accessing the DOHMH Flu Clinic Locator at: <http://a816-healthpsi.nyc.gov/FluPublic/mainView.do>. Businesses and employees can also call 311 for the latest locations on flu vaccinations clinics and for general information on influenza.

Influenza Prevention and Illness Policy

Whether your company holds a vaccination clinic for your employees or promotes obtaining flu vaccinations elsewhere, the NYC Health Department still recommends that businesses implement an Influenza Prevention and Illness Policy as an extra measure to reduce the chances of employees becoming ill due to influenza.

An “[Influenza Prevention and Illness Policy](#)”, with your business’ name or letterhead displayed should be placed on the company’s web site and displayed where appropriate at the worksite. The policy should state that all employees should receive their flu vaccines annually, what the consequences can be to themselves other employees if they don’t receive an influenza vaccine, what flu symptoms are like, and what they should do if they ill from influenza. The policy should also state if the business offers on site influenza vaccinations, if the vaccinations are at no or reduced cost, whether insurance will be billed, if the employee is offered time off to get vaccinated against influenza at the companies on-site flu vaccination clinic or by their own doctor.

In addition to annual influenza vaccination, you can also encourage employees to practice everyday actions that can prevent the spread of infection like influenza:

- ✓ Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Use a tissue or the inside of your elbow – not your hand.
- ✓ Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (PDF).

- ✓ Do not get too close to people who are sick. Maintain a distance of three feet. If you get sick yourself, leave work and stay home.

The Health Department has materials available to encourage hygiene practices that can reduce the spread of influenza. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/flu/html/public/posters.shtml>

In the event employees do come down with influenza-like symptoms, the policy should give instructions telling employees on what course of action they should take.

- ✓ Employees who are experiencing the first symptoms of influenza (see http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/flu/html/public/flu_facts.shtml) should use sick-time or vacation time, go home and avoid contact with other people.
- ✓ Employees should stay home until their fever has resolved for 24 hours without the use of medication.
- ✓ Employees with severe influenza symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, or who have a higher risk of complications from influenza, including people 50 and older; women who are pregnant ; those with health conditions like asthma or chronic respiratory diseases, heart, kidney or liver disease; sickle cell anemia; diabetes; weakened immune system from illness or medication and morbid obesity, should contact their health care provider.

