INFLUENZA? What can I do?
Hit me with your best (flu) shot!

Riverside’s mission is to provide the most remarkable healthcare experiences, and in doing so, we are ever focused on the health and safety of each of our patients. We, too care deeply for the well-being of our employees, faculty, physicians, staff and students.

With flu season just around the corner, influenza’s potential impact on everyone must be addressed. Each year, approximately 36,000 people die and 226,000 are hospitalized due to the flu. These are preventable deaths. Like other progressive healthcare organizations, we want to ensure continued well-being for all and have put into place a mandatory Influenza Vaccination Policy to meet the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) recommendations.

This action is not unique to our region nor our industry. In fact, outlined below other institutions/health systems which have mandated influenza vaccination among their employees?

- Presence St. Mary’s Kankakee, IL
- ACCESS Community Health Network, Chicago, IL
- Adventist Bolingbrook Hospital, Bolingbrook, IL
- Advocate Health Care, Oak Brook, IL
- Catholic Healthcare System, Springfield, IL
- Champaign-Urbana Public Health District, Champaign, IL
- Cook County Health & Hospitals System, Oak Park, IL
- Katherine Shaw Bethea Hospital, Dixon, IL
- Kewanee Hospital, Kewanee, IL
- Loyola University Health System, Illinois
- Mason District Hospital, Havana, IL

In addition, many of the professional associations we hold in high regard also support mandated influenza vaccination among health care personnel?

- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American College of Physicians
- American Hospital Association
- American Medical Directors Association
- American Pharmacists Association
- American Public Health Association
- Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology
- Infectious Diseases Society of America
- National Foundation for Infectious Diseases
- National Patient Safety Foundation
- Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America
In 2013, Riverside’s flu vaccinations among employees was only 78%, well below the recommended target for healthcare workers. Riverside’s mandatory flu vaccination policy will be implemented across all of Riverside Healthcare, as we as an organization seek to have 90 percent compliance for both patient care areas and non-patient care areas.

**Why Mandate Vaccination?**

**Riverside Healthcare mandates Influenza Vaccinations for all Employees to promote the health and safety of employees and patients.**

Each year, approximately 36,000 people die and 226,000 are hospitalized due to the flu. These are preventable deaths. Requiring an annual flu vaccine demonstrates our commitment to protect the safety and health of our patients, many of whom already have weakened immune systems, as well as visitors, co-workers and our families. Vaccination for Health Care Personnel (HCP) has been recommended for years, yet vaccination rates remain at 72% percent nationally. Riverside Healthcare has increased influenza vaccination rate over the years, but they did not achieve the 90 percent goal set despite significant efforts. Overall, voluntary programs have not been effective at markedly increasing vaccination rates. As of the 2014-2015 flu season, Riverside Medical Center will mandated influenza vaccination. Making the flu vaccine mandatory is a step that has also been taken by many of the health care systems in Illinois and in many hospitals throughout the nation.

**Who does this apply to?**

The mandatory influenza vaccination program applies to all individuals, employees, faculty, staff, residents and fellows, temporary workers, trainees, volunteers, students, vendors and voluntary medical staff, regardless of employer, who provide services to patients or work for or within Riverside Healthcare.

**How effective are flu vaccines, especially since virus strains keep changing?**

The flu vaccine is the most effect 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.

**Why can't Riverside stick with our Standard Precautions, namely “Respiratory Etiquette (Cover Your Cough)” and doing a better job of 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. Personnel 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.

Additionally, their absenteeism can stress a health care facility or system. 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.

**Why can't vaccination be voluntary?**

Our highest priority must be to protect our patients, many of whom are exceptionally vulnerable to adverse outcomes from the flu. The research clearly shows that flu vaccinations vastly increase mass immunity and protect immune-suppressed patients.

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**Importance of Being Vaccinated**

**I’m not involved in direct patient care. Why should I 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 employees as well as laundry, 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 since viral shedding may occur up to two to three days prior to the appearance of symptoms. 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.

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**About the Vaccine**

**When should I be vaccinated?**

When the flu season is about to begin, you should get the vaccine as soon as possible. It takes about two weeks to develop protection after receiving the vaccine. Check with the Employee Health Office for information about flu vaccination, including locations and times.
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 was given
- Low-grade fever and aches
- Runny nose, sore throat, cough and headache (nasal mist only)

Any employee who believes that they are experiencing adverse effects related to the vaccination should contact Employee 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 as you are more likely to have serious complications to yourself and your pregnancy if you get the flu. Once you get the flu shot, your body will start producing antibodies that will help protect you against the flu, and this protection can be passed to your unborn baby. According to the CDC, you can receive the flu shot at any time, during any trimester, while you are pregnant.

What if I get vaccinated on my own through my doctor’s office or another location other than a Riverside Healthcare facility?

That is acceptable. If you receive the vaccine elsewhere, please provide documentation to Employee Health by first Tuesday of November.

Exceptions

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 reaction 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-Barré syndrome within six weeks of an influenza vaccine. A Medical Declination of Seasonal Influenza Vaccination form must be completed and returned to Employee Health by the first Tuesday of November. Applications for medical declination will be review by the Employee Health Department and Infection Control Committee. Employees may be asked to attend.
If receiving the vaccination conflicts with sincerely held beliefs, a request for religious accommodation may be made. A Religious Declination of Seasonal Influenza Vaccination form must be completed and returned to Employee Health by the first Tuesday of October. Applications for religious declination will be reviewed by the Influenza Declination Consideration Committee. Employees may be asked to attend.

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

Yes. All personnel who have a medical or religious exception must submit a new request. Because the composition and availability of flu vaccines changes from year to year, certain allergies or concerns may no longer be relevant. All personnel who have an allergy or medical contraindication should fill out the appropriate paperwork and submit it to Employee Health for review.

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

Yes. Those who cannot receive the flu vaccine, whether for religious or medical reasons, will be required to properly wear a protective surgical mask over their mouth and nose during work hours. The mask may be removed while in break rooms and cafeteria for lunch and breaks, or in restrooms. This important step to prevent flu transmission is supported by national patient safety and infectious disease prevention organizations. Those granted exceptions or refuse to have the flu shot will be issued an orange badge clip which will be required to be worn during influenza season while working on Riverside Healthcare property.

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**Compliance**

**What happens if I don’t want to get the vaccine?**

Those who do not receive the flu vaccine will be required to sign a declination and properly wear a protective surgical mask over their mouth and nose during all work hours of flu season. Influenza season will be determined each year by the hospital's Epidemiologist. The mask may be removed while in break rooms and cafeteria for lunch and breaks, or in restrooms. Those granted exceptions or refuse to have the flu shot will be issued an orange badge clip which will be required to be worn during influenza season while working on Riverside Healthcare property. This important step to prevent flu transmission is supported by national patient safety and infectious disease prevention organizations.

Medical staff at all entities who do not have the vaccine and refuse to comply with wearing a mask during all working hours or wear the issued orange badge clip will be placed on administrative suspension of privileges for the duration of the flu season and be subject to discipline up to termination.

Trainees, students, residents or fellows, campus research personnel, volunteers, vendors, voluntary staff or temporary workers who fail to comply with vaccination requirements will not be permitted to enter patient care or clinical care areas for the duration of the flu season.

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**Support for Mandatory Vaccination**

**What other institutions/health systems have mandated influenza vaccination among health care personnel?**
Loyola University Hospital (Chicago, Ill.)

What professional associations support mandated influenza vaccination among health care personnel?

- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American College of Physicians
- American Hospital Association
- American Medical Directors Association
- American Pharmacists Association
- American Public Health Association
- Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology
- Infectious Diseases Society of America
- National Foundation for Infectious Diseases
- National Patient Safety Foundation
- Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America

http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5502a1.htm