

**MANDATORY INFLUENZA VACCINATION FOR HEALTHCARE PERSONNEL**  
**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

- **What are the reasons that NorthShore considers flu vaccinations necessary for its employees/providers/vendors/volunteers/students?**

Administration of flu vaccine for all healthcare personnel is an evidence-based practice that helps to keep our patients safe from getting influenza. Flu vaccine also helps prevent influenza in our employees, medical staff, and the communities we serve.

- **Why is the vaccine now required?**

Since 1984 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended flu vaccine for all healthcare personnel in order to keep patients safe. Voluntary programs result in poor rates of compliance and in order for programs to be effective, vaccination rates need to be 90 percent or greater. NorthShore has had a voluntary program in place and its annual rate of health care personnel vaccination is less than fifty percent. For our sickest and most vulnerable patients, healthcare personnel flu vaccination is a critical patient safety practice.

- **Is the mandate inclusive of all NorthShore employees (both clinical and non-clinical)?**

Yes. This is a uniform policy across NorthShore University HealthSystem for all active personnel and contingent workers (licensed independent practitioners, members of the medical staff, temporary workers, students, researchers, volunteers, contracted and subcontracted personnel including Aramark, Integrated Facilities Solutions (IFS), DaVita, etc.). The mandate covers both clinical and non-clinical employees working in hospitals, medical group offices, as well as business and administrative offices at 4901 Searle Parkway and 1301 Central.

- **When will the mandate go into effect?**

In the fall of 2017 to coincide with the 2017-2018 influenza season.

- **Why should people get vaccinated against the flu?**

Influenza is a serious disease that can lead to hospitalization and even death. Every flu season is different, and influenza infection can affect people differently. Even healthy people can get very sick from the flu and spread it to others. According to the CDC, 200,000 people are hospitalized every year due to the flu with thousands of deaths attributed to the flu in the US annually (this number ranges from a low of 3,000 deaths to a high thus far of 49,000 deaths).

- **When does "flu season" begin and end?**

"Flu season" in the United States can begin as early as October and last as late as May. During this time, flu viruses are circulating at higher levels in the U.S. population. An annual seasonal flu vaccine is the best way to reduce the chances that you will get seasonal flu and spread it to others. When more people get vaccinated against the flu, less flu can spread through that community.

- **How do flu vaccines work?**

Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after vaccination. These antibodies provide protection against infection with the viruses that are in the vaccine. The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the influenza viruses that experts indicate will be most common during the upcoming season. Traditional flu vaccines (called "trivalent" vaccines) are made to protect against three flu viruses; an influenza A (H1N1) virus, an influenza A (H3N2) virus, and an influenza B virus. There are also flu vaccines made to protect against four flu viruses (called "quadrivalent" vaccines). These vaccines protect against the same viruses as the trivalent vaccine and an additional B virus.

- **Why do I need a flu vaccine every year?**

A flu vaccine is needed every season for two reasons. First, the body's immune response from vaccination declines over time, so an annual vaccine is needed for optimal protection. Second, because flu viruses are constantly changing, the formulation of the flu vaccine is reviewed each year and sometimes updated to keep up with changing flu viruses. For the best protection, everyone 6 months and older should get vaccinated annually.

- **Does flu vaccine work right away?**

No. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against influenza virus infection. That's why it's better to get vaccinated early in the fall, before the flu season really gets under way.

- **Can I get seasonal flu even though I got a flu vaccine this year?**

Yes. No vaccine is 100% protective and there is still a possibility you could get the flu even if you got vaccinated. However, you are likely to be far less sick than if you had not had a flu shot. The ability of flu vaccine to protect a person depends on various factors, including the age and health status of the person being vaccinated, and also the similarity or "match" between the viruses used to make the vaccine and those circulating in the community. If the viruses in the vaccine and the influenza viruses circulating in the community are closely matched, vaccine effectiveness is higher. If they are not closely matched, vaccine effectiveness can be reduced. However, it's important to remember that even when the viruses are not closely matched, the vaccine can still protect many people and prevent flu-related complications. Such protection is possible because antibodies made in response to the vaccine can provide some protection (called cross-protection) against different but related influenza viruses.

- **Can the flu vaccine give me the flu?**

No, a flu vaccine cannot cause flu illness. Flu vaccines that are administered with a needle are currently made in two ways: the vaccine is made either with a) flu viruses that have been 'inactivated' and are therefore not infectious, or b) with no flu viruses at all (which is the case for recombinant influenza vaccine). While a flu vaccine cannot give you flu illness, some minor side effects that may occur are: soreness, redness, or swelling at the injection site; fever (low grade); and aches.

- **How will NorthShore handle flu shots administered outside of the organization?**  
Written documentation of vaccine acquired outside of NorthShore must be submitted to Employee Health Services for review. Documentation must be verifiable, and must include date, place, and signature or name of the provider who administered the vaccine.
- **Will the flu vaccination program be annual or ongoing?**  
Flu vaccination is an annual program and will be administered only during flu season.
- **What is the vaccination cycle and how will this impact a new employee starting in May?**  
Influenza season occurs annually -- typically, starting in October and ending in May. During a typical influenza season in which flu activity is low, a new employee starting in May will not be required to be vaccinated; however, the employee will be required to obtain flu vaccination in the following flu season starting in October.
- **Will an employee be allowed to decline the flu vaccine?**  
Exemptions are granted for only **two** primary reasons: (1) medical contraindications, or (2) religious beliefs and/or conscience. These exemptions are explained below:

Exemptions for Medical Contraindications:

Any healthcare personnel declining annual flu vaccine must have one of the valid contraindications, as listed below:

1. Guillain-Barre Syndrome: A history of Guillain-Barre Syndrome within six weeks following a previous dose of influenza vaccine is considered to be a precaution for use of influenza vaccines by the CDC. Verifiable documentation of this condition is required from a licensed healthcare provider.
2. Allergy: Persons with severe allergies to eggs will be offered the cell-based vaccine. Persons with allergy to other vaccine components will need to have a note from their health care provider documenting the allergy.
3. Other medical contraindications will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Exemptions for Reasons of Religion or Conscience:

An employee may be granted an exemption if receiving the vaccination would violate the employee's sincerely held religious beliefs and/or conscience. The employee is required to submit a personal statement (and supporting documentation when available) that must reflect a sincerely held religious and/or conscience conviction in opposition to the vaccination.

- **How will the exemptions for flu vaccine be reviewed?**  
Every request for exemption for flu vaccine will be reviewed for completeness of the required documentation. All personal identifying information will be removed from the exemption request form. This de-identified document is then shared with the interdisciplinary vaccination exemption

committee for review. The committee will share its recommendations with employee health services who will then communicate the decision back to the specific employee/provider/vendor/volunteer/student.

- **If I receive approval for exemption, do I need to submit another request for exemption in the following year?**

Yes. Exemptions must be applied for and renewed each year at the start of the flu season.

- **Will exempt employees be required to comply with any special work requirements?**

An exempt, non-vaccinated staff member may be required to wear a face mask in patient care areas and/or throughout the hospital during the flu season.

- **Can an employee appeal a decision that denies them exemption?**

Yes. If the employee's exemption is denied, the employee has 7 days to appeal to a committee comprised of representation from Hospital Administration, Clinical Leadership, and Human Resources for review. The appeals committee will respond within 7 days of receiving the appeal. The decision of the appeals committee is final and binding.

- **What will happen to individuals who do not comply with the flu vaccination mandate?**

Employees, physicians, and other individuals eligible for flu vaccine need to comply with the vaccination requirement or obtain approval for exemption by the deadline date (November 30th). Individuals who do not comply may be terminated or unable to work or practice at NorthShore locations.

#### **What if I have additional questions that are not addressed in this FAQ?**

Questions not addressed in this FAQ may be submitted to the following email address:

[FluVaccine@northshore.org](mailto:FluVaccine@northshore.org) for additional information and feedback.