

2020 – 2021 Influenza Prevention Plan Communications

Colleague Frequently Asked Questions

9-16-2020 HR4U

This file provides general information. Colleagues should refer to the specific communications shared through their local Health Ministry.



1. **What are the benefits of receiving the influenza (flu) vaccination?**

Flu vaccination will help to keep you, the patients you care for, your family and your colleagues protected against influenza infection. Trinity Health's Mission and Core Values and proven scientific evidence all support flu vaccination.

2. **Will getting the flu vaccination protect me from contracting COVID-19?**

No, getting the flu vaccine protects against the seasonal flu only and not COVID-19. A vaccine is not yet available for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

3. **Why is it particularly important to get the flu vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

This year, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it is especially important that you receive your flu shot. Doing so will help lessen the possible risk of you becoming co-infected with both the flu and COVID-19. Please encourage patients and residents you care for, family and friends to get the vaccine this flu season, too. Widespread flu on top of the COVID-19 pandemic may result in high demand for health care services – especially those who develop severe illness from either or both viruses.

4. **Are flu vaccinations effective?**

Vaccine effectiveness does vary from one flu season (usually October – April) to the next. The effectiveness varies depending on several factors, such as the age and health of the recipient, the types and subtypes of circulating influenza viruses (these change each season) and the degree of similarity between circulating viruses and those included in the vaccine. For last year's flu season, overall vaccine effectiveness against any type of influenza virus was 45 percent.

Vaccination provides important protection from influenza illness and its potential complications. During the six influenza seasons from 2010–11 through 2015–16, influenza vaccination prevented an estimated 1.6–6.7 million illnesses, 790,000–3.1 million outpatient medical visits, 39,000–87,000 hospitalizations, and 3,000–10,000 respiratory and circulatory deaths each season in the United States. (CDC. MMWR 2019; 68(3); 1–21)

5. **Why is vaccination a part of the Influenza Prevention Plan?**

Science clearly supports influenza vaccination for health care personnel as part of a multi-faceted prevention strategy in minimizing seasonal influenza infection.

Unvaccinated colleagues can catch and then spread flu to patients, residents, other colleagues and their loved ones.

In vulnerable patients, influenza can be fatal or result in long hospitalizations. The flu shot is safe and effective. In fact, recent studies demonstrate that influenza vaccination in people with underlying conditions like heart failure and diabetes have better clinical outcomes including improved survival, reduced death and hospitalizations [Gotsman I, et al Am J Cardiol 2020, Modin D, et al Diabetes Care 2020].

It reduces infections and absenteeism among colleagues, prevents transmission to patients and residents and reduces patient and resident hospitalization and mortality. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and major medical and nursing organizations all strongly recommend and/or support requiring all health care personnel be vaccinated annually.

6. Must I receive the flu vaccination at work? Where else can I get it done?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and physical distancing and other safety requirements, not all Health Ministries will offer colleague flu vaccination clinics on campus this year. If your Health Ministry is offering onsite vaccination clinics, you will receive information announcing the dates, times and locations. **Note:** System Office will not be offering onsite vaccination clinics this year.

As always, you can receive your vaccination shot at your doctor's office, an urgent care location, other health care provider location or a Health Ministry or retail pharmacy.

7. When should I get the vaccine?

Trinity Health recommends colleagues receive their flu vaccine between late September and mid-November for protection into the spring.

8. What will the flu vaccine cost?

Colleagues and their family members enrolled in Trinity Health benefits can receive their flu vaccine at no charge at their primary care provider's office when obtaining only a flu vaccination. Colleagues and their family members who are enrolled in Trinity Health benefits with OptumRx as their pharmacy benefit manager also have the option to use their pharmacy card to receive seasonal flu vaccinations at a Health Ministry pharmacy or an OptumRx network pharmacy with a \$0 copay. Colleagues who are enrolled in benefits outside of our health plans, such as through a spouse's employer, should contact their health plan for flu vaccination coverage information.

9. What's the deadline to submit proof of the vaccine?

The deadline will be announced by each Health Ministry, but in general it will be no earlier than Nov. 30, 2020 and no later than Dec. 31, 2020.

10. How do I submit the proof of my vaccination?

If you obtain your shot at a Health Ministry flu vaccination clinic event, the proof of vaccination forms will be recorded following the defined process onsite. You do not need to do anything more.

If you receive your flu vaccination anywhere other than a flu vaccination clinic event, you are required to provide proof of vaccination indicating the date and place (name, address, phone number) that you received the vaccination, date given, vaccination injection site and the administered-by name. You will need to submit this documentation according to the process defined by your Health Ministry.

Important: Trinity Health System Office colleagues have a new online submission process for proof-of-flu-vaccination files and flu vaccination exemption request forms. System Office colleagues who work at or support a Health Ministry location (“Health Ministry embedded”) are required to follow the System Office process and submit their files that way, even if they obtain the shot at a Health Ministry flu shot clinic. System Office colleagues will receive a detailed communication soon.

11. Are there any conditions that would exempt me from getting the flu vaccine?

Medical or religious exemptions may be approved based on a formal review process by each Health Ministry. You must submit an influenza vaccination exemption request form according to your Health Ministry's process. The Health Ministry team who oversees the annual vaccination program thoughtfully considers all reasons on a case-by-case basis. If you have an approved medical or religious reason as stated in the exemption form, you will not be required to get the vaccine.

If your exemption request is approved, you will be subject to Health Ministry requirements or other protective measures during the flu season based on our influenza prevention policy, which takes into consideration any reasonable accommodation requests under state or federal law. If the exemption is not approved and you do not receive the vaccine by the designated date, you will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

12. What is the process to submit my flu vaccine exemption request?

Please complete the Flu Vaccination Exemption Request form. If you are noting a medical reason for the exemption request, certification from your licensed primary care provider (PCP) is required. Please submit the signed PCP certification form when you submit your completed exemption request form. Submit all documentation by the deadline according to the process defined by your Health Ministry.

Trinity Health System Office colleagues have a new proof-of-flu-vaccination and flu vaccination exemption request form online submission process. System Office colleagues who report to a Health Ministry location (“Health Ministry embedded”) are required to follow the System Office process and submit their files through that process, not the Health Ministry process.

13. Is vaccination a requirement for physicians?

Compliance with the Integrated Clinical Services (ICS) policy includes influenza vaccination as a requirement for all Trinity Health colleagues, including physicians employed by Trinity Health.

Physicians who are members of the medical staff of Trinity Health hospitals, and who are not employed by Trinity Health, are subject to the terms of the individual Ministry Medical Staff Bylaws, and medical staff policies and procedures.

14. I am covered by a collective bargaining agreement. Does this requirement apply to me?

It is Trinity Health's intent, for the health of our colleagues and patients, to require the influenza vaccine for all colleagues. We also recognize the need to work with the union leadership where we have collective bargaining agreements to meet this objective.

Your Health Ministry's human resources and leadership will provide specific information on how this requirement applies to you if you are covered by a collective bargaining agreement.

15. If I have an approved exemption, do I have to wear a mask?

Ordinarily, yes, you would be required to wear a mask. However, in line with our ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all colleagues and clinicians are wearing face coverings while at work. Check with your Health Ministry's Infection Prevention and Control and or Employee Health Department for any additional personal protective equipment requirements that apply if unable to receive the vaccine.

16. I do not have direct patient contact in my job. So why do I have to be vaccinated?

Influenza is highly contagious. You may be walking down a hall, riding in an elevator or standing in a line with other colleagues who do have direct patient contact. Alternatively, you may pass by family and friends coming to visit someone in the hospital. With one cough or sneeze, you could spread the flu to someone who does have direct patient contact.

17. I'm working remotely in my home most or all the time due to the pandemic. Why do I need get the flu vaccination?

Working remotely enables physical distancing to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. Thank you for your contributions to that effort. Colleagues working remotely are still at risk of contracting the flu. Trinity Health colleagues in all roles and work environments are required to provide proof of the flu vaccination.

18. What happens if I have a reaction to the flu vaccine?

Contact Employee Health immediately and fill out an incident report, i.e., a "THEIR." Your Health Ministry's Absence Policy will be followed pertaining to any lost work days. Workers' compensation coverage may apply if a causal connection with the flu shot is verified through a claims investigation.

19. Doesn't a vaccination policy violate my rights?

While Trinity Health respects the rights of our colleagues, we must remember that the first obligation of health care personnel is the safety of the patients. We want to protect patients against catching viruses from infected workers, and to keep workers healthy while caring for infected patients.

Vaccination is a duty of care, and this duty must come before our personal preferences. Helping our patients recover from illness and keeping them safe is at the core of the Trinity Health Mission, Core Values and our culture.

20. Why can't the vaccine be voluntary?

Both internal and external data have shown that only the health care organizations that have required vaccination have assured a vaccination rate above the target goal of 90 percent.

Trinity Health is committed to taking the right steps to minimize risk to our patients, residents and colleagues. Therefore, we have decided to require annual influenza vaccination for all health care personnel with the exception of locations in which the mandate is prohibited by state law or terms of a collective bargaining agreement.

21. Can the influenza vaccine cause the flu?

No. The flu shot (injection) does not contain the live virus so it is impossible to get influenza from the vaccine.

22. Why do I need to be vaccinated if I stay home when I am sick?

If unvaccinated, you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know that you are sick. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others (patients, residents and colleagues) beginning one or two days before symptoms develop and up to five days after becoming sick.

23. How long does it take for a flu shot to provide immunity?

It takes about two weeks. That is why it is beneficial to receive the vaccination before there is widespread influenza activity in the community in which you live and work.

24. Aren't the side effects of the vaccination worse than getting the flu?

The most common side effects that you are likely to get would be a sore arm and a low-grade fever. These side effects usually resolve within 48 hours. The risk of a severe allergic reaction is reported to be less than one in four million.

25. Should pregnant women or women who are breastfeeding get the influenza vaccine?

Yes, women who are or will be pregnant during the influenza season should be vaccinated with the flu shot. Flu is more likely to cause severe illness in pregnant women than in women who are not pregnant.

Changes in the immune system, heart and lungs during pregnancy make pregnant women more prone to severe illness or even death from flu. Pregnant women with flu also have a greater chance for serious problems for their unborn baby, including premature labor and delivery.

A flu shot has been shown to protect both the mother and her baby (up to six months old) from flu. The CDC has recommended flu shots to pregnant women in all three trimesters of pregnancy since 2004.

26. Is there a risk of getting Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) from the vaccine?

There is a greater risk of GBS by not getting vaccinated. Influenza can trigger Guillain-Barre and several recent scientific studies have shown the risk of GBS after natural influenza infection is four to seven times greater than among those receiving the influenza vaccine.

27. I don't like shots. Is there an alternative vaccine?

Options may be available. Check with your primary care provider, pharmacy or Employee Health Department for possible options.

28. I am thinking about starting a family. Can the vaccine cause autism?

No scientific data exist that prove a connection between vaccination and autism. The only study that suggested a link between a vaccine and autism involved measles vaccine, but this has been retracted by the authors and denounced as false and misleading by the Journal of the American Medical Association and the Lancet – the journal where this study was published.

29. I have a severe latex allergy. Do I need to be concerned about a reaction?

It is always a good idea to confirm this with the individual or person providing you the vaccine. The manufacturer of the vaccine can also provide this information. Generally, prefilled syringes do not contain latex or other ingredients like preservatives. Multi-dose vials and the intranasal vaccine are latex-free. Check with the provider who's giving vaccine to verify if the syringe is latex-free.

I have an egg allergy. Can I get the influenza vaccine?

Yes. Colleagues who have had an allergic reaction to eggs can get the flu vaccine. Discuss this with Health Ministry's Employee Health nurse or your primary care provider. There is a synthetic vaccine available that is egg-free.

30. I have an allergy to the preservative Thimerosal. Is there a vaccine that does not contain Thimerosal?

Vaccine ordered in single dose syringes by our Health Ministries are usually free of any preservative like Thimerosal. This varies, however, for other formulations like multi-dose vials. Check with the provider who is providing the vaccine if you have questions.

31. Where can I find more information about the flu prevention and the flu vaccine?

Please see the [CDC's Flu Prevention page](#).