

# Issue Brief

POPULATION HEALTH ISSUE BRIEF • OCTOBER 1, 2014

Interested in how your community is doing on flu vaccination rates? The Department of Health & Human Services has a near real-time interactive mapping tool that tracks claims of flu vaccination for Medicare beneficiaries. Although it is not all-inclusive of the population, the tool is a gauge of flu vaccination coverage for those 65 and older. Check it out at [www.hhs.gov/nvpo/flu-vaccination-map/](http://www.hhs.gov/nvpo/flu-vaccination-map/)

## Influenza Vaccination of Health Care Workers

Oct. 1 marks the start of the 2014-2015 flu season. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices and the Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee recommend that all U.S. health care workers receive the flu vaccination annually to protect against influenza.<sup>1</sup> Potential effects of health care worker vaccination include health benefits for the health care professional, patients and families by reducing viral transmission. Missouri's health care leaders and providers have established policies and practices that demonstrate success in mitigating and reducing transmission of the influenza virus within health care facilities.

### WHY IS IT NECESSARY TO GET VACCINATED 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 provides for optimum protection. Second, the flu vaccine formulation is reviewed each year and sometimes updated to keep up with evolving flu viruses. **For the best protection, everyone six months and older should get vaccinated annually.**<sup>2</sup> Vaccination serves a two-fold purpose: protection of the individual and protection of those with whom the individual comes into contact.

### VACCINE TYPES

There are multiple types of flu vaccines, including delivery through an inoculation or through nasal spray. The type and delivery of vaccine is dependent upon many factors: age, health status, and allergy or sensitivity to certain types of food and medication, such as eggs and antibiotics. The CDC has a [table](#) outlining characteristics of each. Flu vaccines are either live attenuated, inactivated, or recombinant, referring to whether or not the virus is "live" and capable of possibly stimulating a disease response. Live-attenuated vaccines are recommended if no contraindications are noted as they cause the strongest immune system response; thus, leading to the strongest prevention of contracting the flu virus.<sup>3</sup>

### HEALTH CARE POLICIES TO REDUCE TRANSMISSION

Health care worker flu vaccination has shown a direct correlation to a reduction in flu-related complications and deaths. Because health care workers are surrounded by the young, seniors, and immuno-compromised individuals on a daily basis, receiving the flu vaccine annually is a component of a comprehensive infection control prevention strategy

4712 Country Club Drive  
Jefferson City, MO 65109

P.O. Box 60  
Jefferson City, MO 65102

573/893-3700  
[www.mhanet.com](http://www.mhanet.com)



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in all health care settings. Having all employees vaccinated promotes greater coverage since the virus easily is transmitted via contact and respiratory droplets throughout the environment. For example, a coder working in medical records has the potential for contact when working with charts previously present in the direct care area.

Health care institutions also benefit from a healthy workforce and productivity through reduced staff illness and absenteeism.<sup>5</sup>

Flu vaccination rates in 2013-14 were highest for health care providers working in hospitals (89.6 percent), a 6.5 percentage point increase from the 2012-13 season (81.9 percent). Coverage was not as high in the long-term care sector (63.0 percent). Increasing vaccination rates in long-term care settings has several implications for overall health considering the greater risk of serious complications, lowered rate of vaccine effectiveness, and demonstration of health benefits in the senior population.<sup>1</sup>

## EMPLOYEE HEALTH STRATEGY

Flu vaccinations in the health care setting should be promoted through use of employee education, promotion and easy access to vaccinations.

There should be minimal or no cost for health care workers to receive the flu vaccine and flexible dates and times should be offered to increase vaccination coverage. Health care systems are proactively establishing policies to ensure a high rate of immunization among the workforce within the hospital setting.

However, it is important to consider that possible exemptions, such as allergy to the vaccine and personal health reasons, need to be addressed and managed through policy. Flu vaccination is part of a larger comprehensive infection control program that includes the use of thorough hand washing practices and personal protective equipment to prevent spread of the virus.<sup>5</sup>

## MISSOURI'S RESPONSE

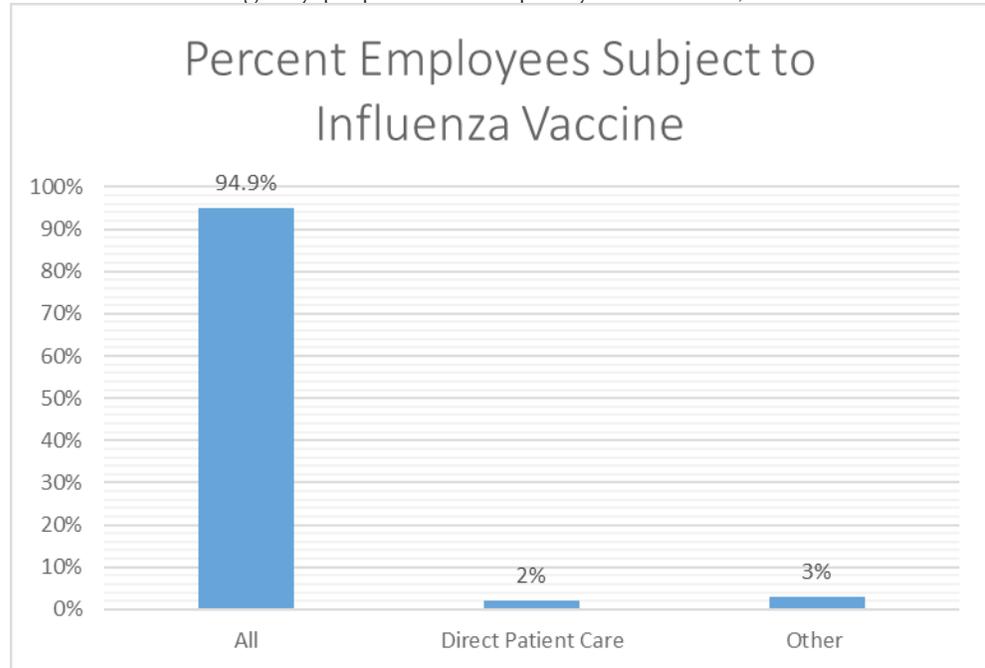
To better assess and summarize Missouri hospitals approach to workforce protection during flu season, the Missouri Hospital Association assesses current policies through the emergency preparedness annual capacity assessment. The following questions were asked in the January 2014 survey and will be reported in the winter 2015 capacity assessment.

- Does your hospital have a policy regarding influenza vaccination for employees?
- Which employees are subject to the influenza vaccination policy?
- Which term best describes the influenza vaccination policy?
- Which of the following consequences apply to employees who are not vaccinated for influenza?
- What percentage of your hospital's health care personnel are vaccinated against influenza?

The data collected demonstrate that Missouri hospitals have established policies to protect their workforce and patients. Of the 102 responding facilities, 94.1 percent of respondents indicated that their hospital has a policy regarding influenza vaccination for employees.

### Graph 1: Percentage of Employees Subject to Influenza Vaccine

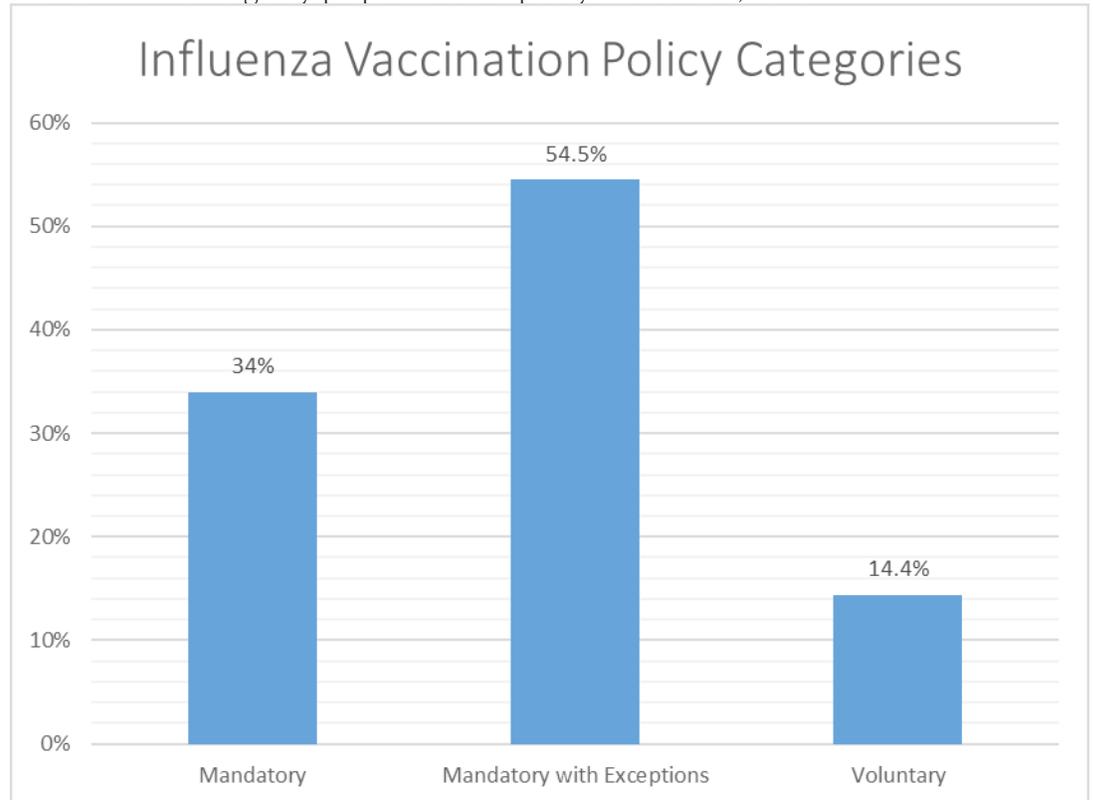
Source: MHA emergency preparedness capacity assessment, 2014



Responses indicate that the majority of those reporting provide and/or require flu vaccine for all employees in the health care setting, while only 2 percent require direct care workers only.

### Graph 2: Categorization of Influenza Vaccination Policy

Source: MHA emergency preparedness capacity assessment, 2014

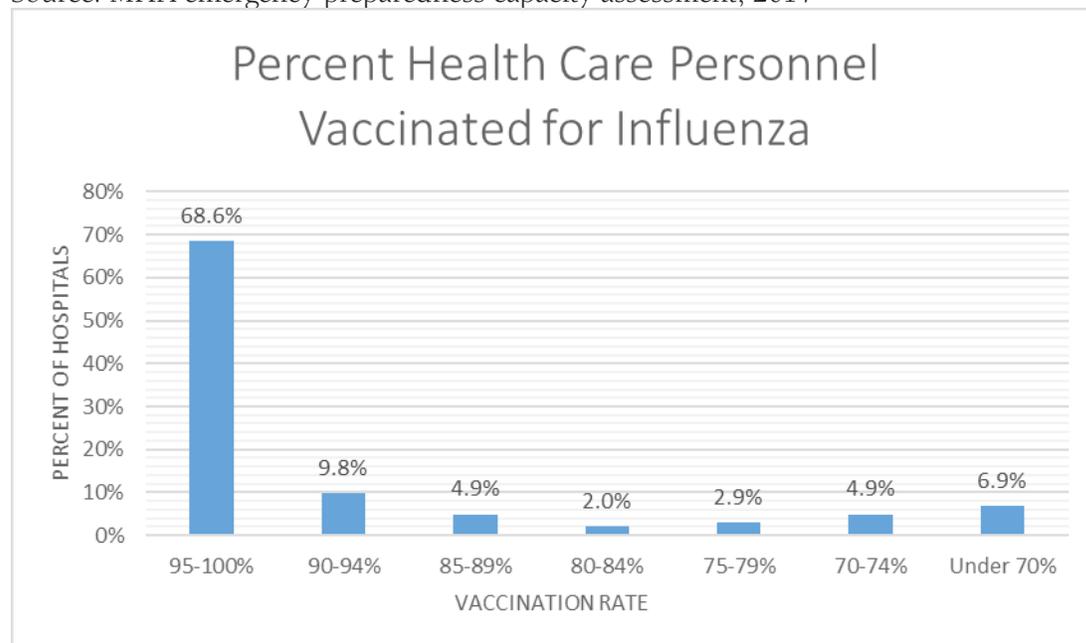


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Although flu vaccination is not deemed mandatory nationally, 34 percent of Missouri hospitals require staff vaccination. If staff refuse or provide an exemption, use of a mask when providing patient care, reassignment to non-patient care duties and dismissal, are possible consequences reported in the assessment.

### Graph 3: Percentage of Health care Personnel Vaccinated for Influenza

Source: MHA emergency preparedness capacity assessment, 2014



The rate of health care workers vaccinated per hospital varies. However, the 68.6 percent of hospitals report a vaccination rate between 95-100 percent.

## CONCLUSION

In an effort to improve infection control outcomes and promote healthy communities, MHA continues to promote hospital policies that encourage and maximize high vaccine compliance by health care workers. Missouri health care leaders and providers have established policies and practices to reduce transmission of the influenza virus in hospitals. These practices contribute to increased resiliency throughout Missouri communities. In addition, during the flu season, MHA staff routinely monitor state-level flu surveillance data and communicate significant changes to Missouri hospitals through several established methods. Together we are prepared.

## OTHER RESOURCES

- [Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services](#)
- [CDC.gov](#)
- CDC-Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee
- Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices
- [National Adult and Influenza Immunization Summit](#)

## STAFF CONTACTS

Alison Williams, R.N., BSN, MBA-HCM  
Vice President Clinical Quality Improvement

Jackie Gatz, MPA  
Director of Emergency Preparedness

## SUGGESTED CITATION

Williams, A. & Gatz, J. (2014). MHA Issue Brief: Influenza Vaccination of Health Care Workers.

## REFERENCES

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