

## 'Tis the Season for Flu Shots: Tips for Employers September 18, 2020 By Amy Hammond

Encourage employees to vaccinate with (or without) an onsite event

It's time to get shot; make sure your employees don't miss out. We're talking of course about the flu vaccine, that yearly preventative measure that today is more important than ever. The prospect of contracting both COVID-19 and this year's flu strain is too potentially dire to imagine. Can you imagine enduring the 'twindemic' triggered by a dual diagnosis of COVID and influenza?

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As an employer, you can inspire members of your workforce to choose vaccination and thus take a proactive step that can lead to lower absenteeism rates companywide. Like COVID, influenza is not welcome in the workplace. Unlike COVID, there's something we can do as a society about contracting influenza. That begins and ends with the flu shot.

But how effective really is the flu shot at preventing influenza – and who should make absolutely sure to receive it? Dispelling the below myths will give your employees the confidence they need in order to stick those arms out (literally).

Myths surrounding the flu shot include:

We don't know which strain of flu will be most prevalent, so the flu shot likely won't be that effective. While it's true that different strains of flu exist and that it's difficult to state for sure which will be the most dangerous year-to-year, getting the flu shot is a solid idea because, according to the Centers for Disease Control, each vaccine includes immunity against four strains. That's a decent gamble!

I don't get sick a lot, so I don't need this shot. This has always been a very loose argument because it only takes one time contracting the flu to change one's mind forever. The flu can be extremely serious. Thousands – in fact, tens of thousands die of the flu each year. Even in mild cases, it wrecks a person's week (or even two weeks).

My kids get the shot, so I don't need to. Who is going to take care of said kids if you're laid up because of the flu? Enough said.

My child is too young to get the flu shot. Babies aged 6 months and older can receive the flu shot – and they may be eligible for the nasal vaccine. That means no needles involved!

I always get sick from the flu shot. While some people have mild symptoms they attribute to the flu shot, those symptoms are much less serious than those that can potentially occur with the full-blown flu. The virus contained in the flu shot vaccine has been inactivated. Any side effects from the shot should be mild.

I hate needles; if I can't get the nasal vaccine, I won't do it. For those aged 2–49, the nasal vaccine is often an option. Those who are pregnant should opt for a syringe instead. If a person really can't stand needles, he or she should talk with a medical professional regarding the positives and negatives of that year's nasal version.

Now that we've dispelled those myths, let's be clear: there's an extra reason to make sure everyone eligible receives the flu vaccine this year. A twindemic of COVID/INFLUENZA is threatening our nation. Employers can help in the fight to prevent a 'twindemic' outbreak. Make sure your workers understand the benefits of the flu shot and where to receive the vaccination. Used to hosting an annual on-site clinic but forced to skip it this year? Motivate your workforce in

ways other than shot proximity. We know this is a very real challenge; about 30% of our clients who host onsite clinics have had to cancel due to an inability to meet on-site minimums.

There's no cure yet for COVID; it's time we get creative and inspire those around us to take healthy inoculation initiative. We're all hoping for an end to COVID. In the meantime, here's how to motivate your staff to inoculate against the malady we often can prevent: flu.

Tell everyone how to get the shot. For free. The flu shot is a preventative service. It's covered at 100% when the member visits a participating pharmacy or retail location. With social distancing recommendations still in effect in many states, look for more drive-through opportunities. Be transparent regarding where people may not want to receive the shot. Be sure to share the possibility that a primary care physician may possibly charge a copay for an office visit if they choose to go that route. Sharing this information is similar to that of advising those who opt to visit the emergency room for every sniffle to choose a primary visit or walk-in clinic instead. When cost is an issue, information is invaluable.

Got a shot? –You get a smoothie! (Hopefully the employee will choose the Vitamin C-rich option over that chocolate brownie peanut butter bomb on the menu). Grocery gift cards make a great reward as well. Consider gifting wellness baskets stocked full of wholesome goodies: oranges, hand sanitizer and tissues are favorites. While you're at it, print out some flyers about flu shots, telehealth, and EAP. Stuff those in the baskets – people need something to read while they're eating those orange segments.

Post signage – If you do have employees on-site, put informational signage in well-trafficked areas. Download free flyers from the CDC here: <https://bit.ly/2H0GNNW>.

Educate, educate, educate – Influenza and COVID-19 are both respiratory illnesses. Consider the decision to vaccinate this way: We do not, at the time this blog was written, possess a vaccine or powerfully effective treatment for COVID-19. We do, however, have the flu shot. Not electing to receive the flu shot leaves an individual doubly vulnerable.

Most onsite clinics are already scheduled, so that route may be out of the question for this year. Go ahead and mark your calendar for Summer of 2021 as the pivotal moment you reach out to schedule the next one, however. Hopefully by then we will have an effective vaccine for COVID-19 as well.

We understand that in this current health climate it can be especially overwhelming to guide your employees toward healthy decisions like vaccination. Need assistance motivating employees to receive the flu shot? Not sure where to start? Usually have an onsite clinic but not hosting one due to a remote worker shift? –I'm here for you. Contact me (Trish Blocker) at 727-522-7777.