



December 5, 2011

Dear Long-Term Care Medical Director:

December 4–10 is National Influenza Vaccination Week, and we are taking this opportunity to ask for your help in ensuring that health care personnel (HCP) who work in long-term care settings are vaccinated against influenza. Influenza vaccination of HCP has been recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices since 1984, and is endorsed by a growing number of medical professional organizations (1).

Each year, between 13% and 34% of skilled nursing homes report an influenza outbreak (2,3). As you know, many of these outbreaks carry substantial societal and financial costs. During a confirmed influenza outbreak, a review of the literature estimated that 33% of residents and 23% of staff develop an influenza-like illness. Among affected residents, an estimated 14% are hospitalized and 6% die (4).

Both HCP and residents of long-term care facilities need influenza vaccination. Vaccinating HCP has been shown to reduce the mortality of nursing home residents by 30–40%, even when patient vaccination coverage levels are high (5-7). One study found HCP vaccination levels of 60% or greater led to significant decreased risk of nursing home influenza outbreaks (8). Influenza vaccination of HCP has also been linked to fewer documented lost workdays attributable to respiratory infections and fewer days on which HCP felt unable to work (9-11).

Influenza vaccination rates of HCP have been increasing slowly over time. In the last three years, seasonal influenza vaccination levels of HCP who work in long-term care settings have ranged from 50–65% (12, 13). However, we are still well below the national Healthy People 2020 target of 90%.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) along with medical professional societies and other partner organizations have identified a number of approaches to increase influenza vaccination rates among HCP (14). In recent years, many facilities have been able to rapidly increase coverage to close to 100%. Influenza vaccination can be provided at modest cost, and is paid for by most insurance carriers.

As we move to this year's National Influenza Vaccination Week, we urge you to support vaccination of HCP in your organizations. Thank you for your efforts to reduce infectious diseases and improve public health.

Sincerely,

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