

**Agenda Item Number:**

**ORANGE COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH  
AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY**

**Meeting Date:** September 24, 2014

**Agenda Item Subject:** Mandatory Flu Vaccination for OCHD Employees

**Attachment(s):** Mandatory Flu Vaccine Recommendation; Flu Survey Findings

**Staff or Board Member Reporting:** Pam McCall, Public Health Nursing Director

**Purpose:**  Action  
 Information only  
 Information with possible action

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**Summary Information:**

Complications from influenza result in about 36,000 deaths and 226,000 hospitalizations each year in the U.S. In NC last flu season there were 109 deaths attributed to the flu.

Influenza vaccine is recommended for everyone over age 6 months with rare exceptions. In particular, healthcare workers are urged to get the flu vaccine in order to prevent the spread of infection in vulnerable populations. To this end many healthcare organizations, including health departments, are requiring annual influenza immunization for their employees.

OCHD Leadership Team recommends making annual influenza vaccination a condition of employment for staff beginning this year. There will be religious and medical exemptions granted under this proposal, but unvaccinated individuals will need to wear masks when interacting with patients or high risk individuals.

We have solicited staff feedback on the proposal through a 2 question survey. The results are attached.

Two employees will present the arguments "in support of" and "against" the flu vaccine mandate at the BOH meeting.

**Recommended Action:**  Approve  
 Approve & forward to Board of Commissioners for action  
 Approve & forward to \_\_\_\_\_  
 Accept as information  
 Revise & schedule for future action  
 Other (detail):

## **Orange County Health Department**

### **Recommendation Requiring Influenza Vaccination as a Condition of Employment**

#### **Background**

It is estimated that each year about 36,000 people die and 226,000 are hospitalized due to complications from influenza infection. Last flu season, in North Carolina, there were 107 deaths attributed to complications of influenza. These are preventable deaths. The flu vaccine is the most effective method to prevent influenza infection.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that all persons six months of age and older, especially healthcare workers should be vaccinated annually against influenza. Persons who are infected with influenza virus, including those who are pre-symptomatic, can transmit the virus to coworkers and patients, including those at higher risk for complications from influenza. Vaccination of working age adults, including healthcare workers, has been associated with reduced risk of influenza illness, and reduced work absenteeism, antibiotic use, and medical visits.

Healthcare organizations, including local health departments, have begun requiring annual influenza vaccination for their employees. At least sixteen healthcare systems and agencies in North Carolina require influenza vaccination as a condition of employment. Medical or religious exemptions can be requested if applicable.

#### **Rationale**

The Leadership Team recommends that annual influenza vaccination be required as a condition of employment for staff employed at Orange County Health Department for the following reasons:

- Requiring annual influenza vaccination for employees demonstrates a commitment to protect the safety and health of patients, visitors, co-workers and our families.
- Mandatory influenza vaccination for healthcare workers is congruent with requiring vaccinations such as MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella), pertussis and varicella to protect patients from these vaccine-preventable diseases.
- Maintaining a healthy workforce is essential to meeting the fundamental mission of the department, which is serving the residents, workers, and visitors of Orange County.

#### **Process**

The mandatory flu vaccination policy will require all Health Department employees to show documentation of current influenza vaccination by October 17, 2014 (deadline may be extended if vaccine shipment is delayed). The documentation should be turned in to your supervisor.

Employees with medical or religious exemptions will have the same deadline to show proper documentation. A note stating that the employee should not receive the vaccine signed by the

employee's healthcare provider is sufficient for the medical exemption. A signed statement saying that receiving the influenza vaccine is contrary to the employee's religion will be accepted as appropriate documentation.

During flu season, employees who cannot receive the flu vaccine, whether for religious or medical reasons, will be required to properly wear a protective surgical mask over their mouth and nose when within 6 feet of any client. "Flu season" is the time period that the state and CDC conduct and disseminate weekly flu surveillance data – typically mid- October through mid-May. If there is still a relatively high level of flu activity outside of the defined season the health director may extend the period that staff not receiving the vaccine would have to wear a mask.

All employees who do not comply and have not received a medical or religious exemption will be placed on unpaid administrative leave for one week. If at the end of the week the employee has not met the vaccination requirement, the employee will be considered to have voluntarily resigned.

The flu vaccine will be provided at no charge to the employee. If the employee doesn't have insurance or their insurance doesn't cover the flu vaccine they should arrange to have the vaccination at OCHD so that they can receive it at no charge. Otherwise the employee can use their United Healthcare card to receive the vaccination at various locations in the area including OCHD.

For additional information about influenza and the influenza vaccine please visit the following websites:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>

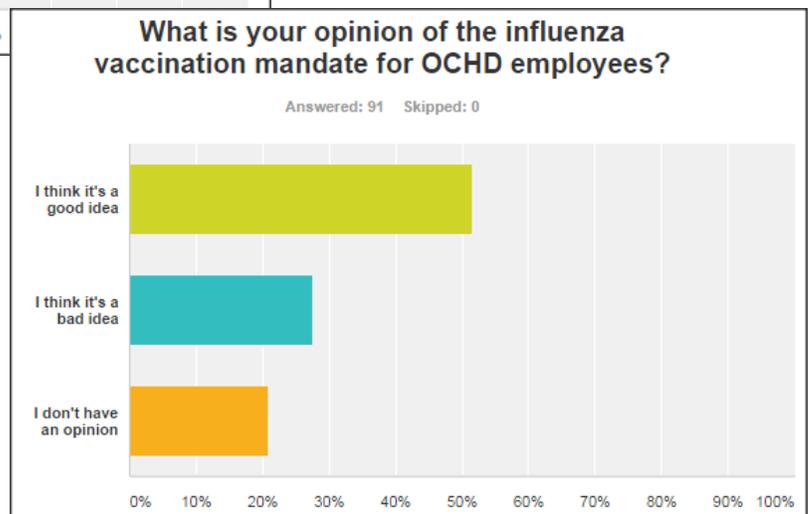
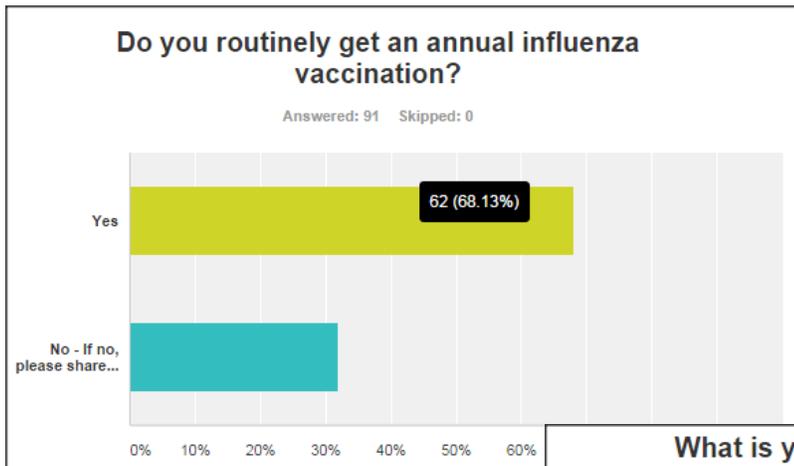
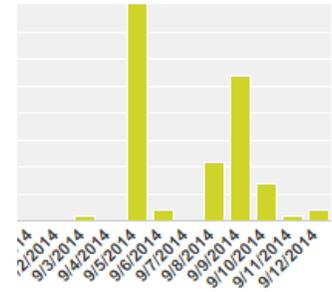
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/misconceptions.htm>

<http://www.immunize.org/honor-roll/influenza-mandates/>

# OCHD Flu Survey

## Summary

- 91 respondents in two response waves
- 68% (62) routinely get an annual flu vaccine, 32% (29) do not.
  - Major reasons they don't:
    - Ineffective healthy makes-you-sick no-time no need
    - Low-risk group unsafe vaccine body-ownership not-always need more info
- 52% (47) think the vaccine mandate is a good idea, 27% (25) a bad idea, and 21% (19) have no opinion
  - Major reasons for:
    - Protects-patients lead-by-example follow best practices
  - Major reasons against / undecided:
    - mandate-is-wrong-method punishment too severe personal decision
    - need more data/info cost/convenience makes-you-sick



## Reasons individuals didn't get an annual flu vaccine

- I'm not convinced that the vaccine is necessary or effective, and I am still unsure as to whether or not it is safe.
- Questions about the validity of the need for the vaccine. Side effects, GBS, contents in the flu shot.
- I am pretty healthy never get a cold maybe once a yr. and sometimes 2 yrs.
- not always
- I don't think I'm high risk, and I don't interact regularly with sick people, children or the elderly. Don't get me wrong - I believe in vaccines, etc., but I am also a minimalist in terms of medical intervention and my body. I'm not sure I understand the added benefit to me or the health department, especially since I don't interact with clients.
- time/convenience, and often i see a strong correlation between getting the vaccine and getting sick shortly after
- No particular reason
- Did not see the need.
- Don't feel that it is beneficial. I have heard reports of people getting the flu shot and have literally gotten sick from it with flu like symptoms. It was also reported that a healthy 7 year old child received the flu vaccination and the child ended up dying from getting flu like symptoms after the vaccination
- I do not routinely get ill and if I do, I do not come to work to expose patients. My employer should not mandate my personal health care decisions.
- The last time I got a vaccine resulted in me getting sick
- I have not been able to the last couple of years cause I was sick at the time they were offered
- Depends on if I have time and if my job provides the vaccine.
- Normally do not have the flu
- No particular. I have never had the flu. My immune system tends to be very strong
- I have never gotten a flu vaccine because of concerns regarding the safety of the vaccine. I am aware of the pros and cons and have consciously chosen not to get the flu vaccine.
- After researching information about the vaccine, I do not feel it is in my best interest to have one. I think there are other ways to optimize the chances of you're not getting the particular strain you are vaccinated for.
- I'm a very healthy person with great personal hygiene and I don't let others invade my personal space.
- Lack of information prior
- Base in my medical history. My doctor has not recommended a flu shot.
- I want to but I'm often too busy to get to it.
- I used to get it yearly and also got the flu yearly. The years that I have not received the shot, I have not gotten the flu. While I understand there is no relation between getting the shot and getting the flu, I also question its efficacy. I feel it is my right as an autonomous human being to choose which drugs I put in my body without my employer having a say in it. If a patient is immune compromised, they are more likely to have contact to the flu sitting in our waiting room with the other patients who have yet to receive their flu shots than by the front desk/nurse/provider/tech who takes routine measures to reduce their transmission of germs. I support the flu shot as a voluntary way to reduce the risk of becoming ill if you so choose. I do not support my employer mandating my personal life. This is not Hobby Lobby.

## Reasons individuals didn't get an annual flu vaccine, cont.

- I feel like I live a very healthy lifestyle through natural practices and do not feel like a mandatory influenza vaccination is something with which I would agree.
- I am in good health and in low risk category. As I get older and the risks increase I intend to get them. I am in my mid 40s and I have never had the flu.
- I have never received the vaccination I don't feel it's necessary.
- It was a choice of my, however I usually don't get sick. But one thing I notice that most of the people that get the flu shot was out sick more than the people that don't get the shot.
- must years I do but not always
- It's not annually but it's almost annually. I got one last year, but not the year before
- I've heard some mixed things about health, since sometimes my immune system is a bit compromised w/ Lyme "flare-ups".

## What is your opinion of the mandate?

### I think it's a good idea

- I think this should be mandatory. It not only protects the employee but protects our patients and the other employees.
- I believe we need to lead by example. We ask the residents to get their immunizations and we should too. In addition, we interact with the public on a daily basis, the flu vaccine will protect our staff and the people we interact with.
- I am still not confident in the efficacy of the vaccine.
- This is great. I hope this passes
- I'm very pro vaccine especially for front line providers working in the community. I also think it sets a positive precedent.
- We should we do it to protect our patients and coworkers.
- I feel that the people that don't have direct contact with the patients should have a choice whether to get the shot or not.
- With so many other medical facilities requiring flu vaccination for their employees, it would be a little embarrassing for the Health Department not to.
- We are the health leaders for the county, and the flu vaccine is an important part of health.
- The Health Dept. should set an example for preventative care and healthy behaviors. Places like UNC mandate the flu vaccine to protect both staff and patients/the public, so we should, too!
- I think that requiring employees to have the vaccine by mid-October is too early in the season. I prefer to get my vaccine in November or early December to ensure coverage through spring
- We are place of health for our clients and our employees. Getting the flu vaccine is important for because it will keep us and our families healthier, keep our clients safer, and help avoid a decrease in productivity/efficiency because of absences during flu season. I don't know of any credible reason, other than a medical exemption, not to get the flu vaccine! I appreciate that our organization is taking proactive steps to protect the health of us and our clients.

### I don't have an opinion

- I think people should have a choice. But I take the vaccine because I am around pregnant women and children and I would feel guilty if I gave them the flu.
- I'm not crazy about the idea, but I'm not going to throw my hands up in opposition. Do we have data or research that show how this would be a benefit to our patients and/or staff?
- Please consider providing the recommended Hep. Vaccine at no cost to those of us that work in solid waste or with septic systems. Thanks
- I can see the reasoning why employees should get it and what we stand for and how we should be examples but I can understand why some may not agree with it.
- If it's mandated, I think that it needs to be available for free for anyone who is required to get it, and isn't covered by insurance (including student interns, volunteers, and contractors).

## I think it's a bad idea

## [What is your opinion of the mandate? (cont.)]

- The choices I make about my personal health care have always been my own. Evidently, the Leadership Team has decided they want to make my health care choices for me and are mandating that I get the vaccination. I would like to have some say so regarding what is put into my body. John Kase
- I think we are capable of making our own decision
- Simply highly recommended is good enough.
- i think it should be the decision of the employee
- I'm not entirely convinced that making a mandate as part of a job requirement is the correct way to go about achieving what you are hoping to achieve.
- Those that do not work with patients should not be required to get the vaccination.
- I think that it should be a person's choice if they want to receive the vaccination. It should not be mandatory. Everybody's body is different and everyone could have different reactions to the vaccination. There have been reports of people getting sick after receiving the vaccination. And if a person think that they might get sick from it, then it should be their choice to get the vaccination and not take the chance of getting sick.
- I think it should still be optional
- It should be encouraged and maybe required, but the mode of enforcement (unpaid leave and possible dismissal) is too extreme and probably not in line with the county's enforcement of other requirements.
- The "carrot" is preferable to the "stick" methodology. Start with education and sound arguments based on research as to why it is important. Explain the consequences of not vaccinating. Make it free, easy and convenient to vaccinate. Reward those who do rather than punish those who don't. .
- I don't think employees that have an exemption for the flu vaccine should be routinely mandated to wear protective masks when interacting with patients, even if they have no symptoms and are in good health. Beyond this important detail, in general, I think receiving the flu vaccine should be voluntary.
- I feel that we should have the right to decide whether we want to take the vaccine or not as it is our body and we should decide what medicines we want to put into it. As with any medications, there are always health risks involved in taking the vaccine. This should definitely not be a condition of employment.
- I think it is a bad idea to mandate it for "all" employees. We are not mandating housing, who shares a space at WHSC, or Social Services, who shares space at SHSC, to get the vaccine. I don't understand why EH, HPES or FAS would be required. I do agree that all clinical staff should be required to get the vaccine, and any other required vaccinations for their protection.
- It would be better if was made available each year to employees.....but to force us to get a flu shot is taking things a bit far. Some of us do not work in clinics or have close contact with our clients.
- We should have the right to decide if we are getting it or not. It should be recommended...but it should NOT be mandatory. I know coworkers who get the flu shot every year, and they get the flu. In my case, I never had the flu and I never had the flu shot.
- If this measure passes, I will likely look for work elsewhere whether or not I choose to get the flu shot this year. I have not decided whether to get immunized this year, but it will always be my choice.
- Although I see the benefit of it for staff in direct contact with patients I still feel like it should be an option for all staff. We are all very aware of how to remain healthy through lifestyle choices (diet/exercise), preventative medical care, and hand sanitizing. I would like to still have the freedom of deciding every year if the flu shot is beneficial for me.
- It should be a personal preference since we are not in the military or in school here.