



## AMDA Best Practices on Influenza Vaccination for 2020-2021

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The goal of universal influenza vaccination of both residents and staff—and even vendors and visitors—in post-acute long-term care remains critical, especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic that will affect long term care for many months to come. AMDA-The Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine has identified resources and best practices to help medical directors, administrators, directors of nursing, and other staff to increase the influenza immunization rate in their facilities, and create a culture where vaccination of staff, residents and visitors is expected and understood by all to be one of the most effective ways to decrease the risk of influenza among both staff and residents as well as the subsequent morbidity and mortality that can occur from influenza. This understanding of the role of vaccination will be especially important as we begin preparing for an eventual COVID-19 vaccine.

### Mandate Immunization

Keeping healthcare personnel healthy this influenza season is especially vital as post-acute and long-term care (PALTC) facilities already face staff shortages due to COVID-19. In addition, as testing for COVID-19 remains a challenge in many places, this may be further complicated when testing for influenza becomes necessary as well.

Influenza vaccination rates of healthcare personnel in long term care are the lowest in all of healthcare at 68% (<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/healthcareworkers.htm>). There are state-by-state differences in immunization requirements for long term care staff. If your state does not require immunizations, your facility may be able to require them, depending on state law. Some long-term care health systems mandate the flu vaccine for all staff, as most hospitals do. If your facility plans to create a policy on mandatory influenza vaccination, you can use this sample policy as a guide:

[https://ldh.la.gov/assets/docs/Fight the Flu/2018/SampleLTCFluVaccinationPolicy.pdf](https://ldh.la.gov/assets/docs/Fight_the_Flu/2018/SampleLTCFluVaccinationPolicy.pdf)

Immunization programs for staff are extremely important and ideally, the PALTC facility (as the employer) should REQUIRE influenza vaccines (if allowable by state law) for every employee and plan to give this during the workday. AMDA-The Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine recommends mandatory influenza vaccination for all post-acute and long-term care health care personnel unless there is a medical contraindication.

<https://paltc.org/sites/default/files/AMDA%20Flu%20Vaccine%20Policy%20Final2.pdf>

## **Track Refusals and Reasons for Refusal**

If your facility does not currently mandate the flu vaccine, you might consider first starting with a mandatory report of who has gotten the vaccine and who has not, giving employees the option to check off why they are choosing not to be vaccinated. This can help your team understand the barriers to vaccination and develop educational efforts and logistical strategies to overcome these barriers. Tracking of vaccination and refusal can be facilitated by involvement of information technology (IT) team.

The Good Samaritan Society, a non-profit provider of home health, skilled care and senior living with locations in 23 states across the country, recently improved its influenza vaccination rate to 98% after mandating the vaccine last year. The organization credits its IT team for developing flu vaccine tracking system that allow all staff to see the vaccination rates of fellow staff across all regions, and also allow leadership to know who had not yet been vaccinated and approach those individuals with additional education and, at times, a meeting with the chief medical officer for a discussion. Regional vice presidents also felt the pressure (amidst friendly competition with other regional VPs) to increase their regions vaccination rates.

## **Educate Staff**

Educating health care personnel about the influenza vaccine can also play a key role in increasing vaccination rates, as there is much misinformation available on the Internet and social media. The CDC has a variety of materials to help promote and educate your staff about the flu vaccine:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/toolkit/long-term-care/resources.htm>

Some additional educational initiatives to consider:

- Require new employees to take an education course on the flu and why it is so important to get the flu vaccine, especially when working with older adults
- Create a short (3-4 minutes), animated video that provides basic flu information and explains the importance of getting a flu shot.
- Develop an “FAQ” document that dispels the myths surrounding vaccination and share with employees
- Put a streaming banner on your organization’s intranet with a short news article about the importance of the flu shot this year, and add a designated “flu page” on your organization’s intranet that includes an education section with links to short video, posters and other tools created by CDC
- Share status updates and data directly with your leadership so they can identify barriers and work to overcome them



## Facilitate Administration of Vaccine

Ideas to help motivate staff to get immunized include:

- Use a role model within the leadership —like a picture of the administrator getting their vaccine as a poster in the entryway (the Good Samaritan Society posted a video of the CMO giving a flu shot to the CEO)
- Have the CMO and other trusted, well-known members of leadership send regular emails to staff encouraging them to get vaccinated
- Provide leaders at all locations with toolkits to educate and promote vaccinations to staff, ensuring a consistent message across all locations
- Make it fun by providing prizes and giveaways for staff that get immunized (e.g. special parking place drawings, free meal tickets, gift cards, extra vacation day)
- Identify nursing assistant and nurse “vaccine champions” to educate and encourage co-workers to get vaccine
- Obtain vaccination consent at the time of hiring for an annual immunization
- Hold a “flu vaccine drive” with a staff prize (lunch/pizza party) when 90% of staff get vaccinated
- Host on-site vaccine clinics for multiple days
- Create “flu vaccine carts”—make it mobile—we come to you!

## Address Barriers to Vaccination for Staff

Anticipate the barriers and excuses that healthcare personnel will have and be ready to respond to them.

Barrier for HCP/Staff	Information and Techniques to Overcome the Barrier
Lack of requirement / regulation	Make your own facility regulations. (See sample policies.) Make annual flu vaccination part of new employee agreement.
Time for staff to administer vaccines	Allocate one or two staff members to provide vaccines on specified days. Contract with a pharmacy or vaccine provider to do this for free (and see if the actual vaccine can be covered by the facility's health insurance provider).

<b>Costs of vaccines</b>	<p>Provide information about what PALTC facility's health insurance covers and how much.</p> <p>Influenza vaccine is relatively inexpensive, and the cost is covered by many facilities and is also required to be covered by insurers under the Affordable Care Act.</p> <p><a href="https://www.hhs.gov/answers/affordable-care-act/will-the-aca-cover-my-flu-shot/index.html">https://www.hhs.gov/answers/affordable-care-act/will-the-aca-cover-my-flu-shot/index.html</a></p> <p>Influenza can lead to a decrease in ability to work and function. Consider the potential cost of getting sick with the flu, especially if sick leave is not available. It may take up to two weeks to recover from flu.</p>
<b>Lack of knowledge or misinformation about safety of vaccines</b>	<p>Provide staff with a flu FAQ that addresses common misinformation about vaccinations and the flu vaccine.</p> <p>Be ready with data about the components of flu vaccine and its safety to counter false claims made by anti-vaccine advocates.</p>
<b>Consent issues for staff</b>	<p>Emphasize mandatory vaccination policies during the hiring process and vaccinate new employees within 48 hours.</p> <p>Obtain renewable informed consent from employees, contractors, and health professions students.</p>

## **Increase Immunization Rates of Residents**

Facilities are strongly encouraged to make annual vaccination a requirement for all residents. According to the Immunization Action Coalition, federal law does not require a parent, patient, or guardian to sign a consent form in order to receive a vaccination; providing them with the appropriate Vaccine Information Statement VIS(s) and answering their questions is sufficient under federal law. <https://www.immunize.org/askexperts/documenting-vaccination.asp>

The CDC has tools to help your staff educate residents and their family members about the importance of getting vaccinated against the flu:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/prepare-practice-tools.htm>.

Enhanced influenza vaccines have been developed to overcome age-related decline in immunity. Three types of enhanced influenza vaccines are available for use in older adults in the United States: high dose, adjuvanted, and recombinant vaccines. The Gerontological Society of America, in partnership with the Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses Association and the Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine, have developed four Fact Sheets on Enhanced



Influenza Vaccine Products in Long Term Care that address the benefits of enhanced influenza vaccine and offer practical strategies for increasing their use in PALTC settings.

<https://paltc.org/flufactsheets>

Below are some practical suggestions for how to approach and respond to residents and their family members (and even staff) who are reluctant to get the vaccine or think they don't need it:

- *"I'd like to give you your annual influenza vaccine. This is especially important this year as we are all coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. It's a simple, easy thing you can do to protect your health and everyone else here."*
- For residents who may be reluctant to get the vaccine, try to determine the cause of their reluctance by asking, *"What's keeping you from getting the flu vaccine this year?"* Based on their answer, you can provide an appropriate response. For example, offer acetaminophen (as part of a standing order) if they are concerned about aches/pain at the injection site, or respond to concerns about the safety of the vaccine that they may have heard from family members.
- Help the staff anticipate objections from residents, like *"I always get the flu when I get the flu shot."* A suggested response: *"The flu vaccine that we give you cannot give you an infection; there is no live virus. You may experience some aches or pains or minor fever---and this means the vaccine is working! It's making your immune system turn on and respond. And it's so much better to get the vaccine than it is to get the flu."*
- Another common objection: *"I never get the flu, so I don't need the flu shot."* Suggested response: *"We have learned so much about viral infections this year due to COVID-19. And we know that just like COVID-19, people can get an asymptomatic infection with influenza. While that person does not get sick, they can pass it on to other people. That's why I get the flu shot each year. So, I protect you if I get sick and don't know it. You can do that for other people here too."* Another suggested response, for younger adults and staff: *"Every time you get a vaccine, your body develops long-lasting immunity. As we get older, our immune systems become less effective and we are not so good at responding to new diseases. But if you can help your body develop an immune response now, while you're in your (40s/50s/60s), it will help you when you're 80 to fight off the flu. It's like an investment in your future."*
- *"I took it last year."* Suggested response: *"That's great! And since flu strains change from year to year, the vaccine is a little different each year too, so let's do what we can to protect you this year too."*

The goal is to move beyond checking boxes and truly get needles into arms. Try to get all current residents vaccinated and vaccinate new admissions as they move into the facility.

Educate family members about the importance of their loved ones getting vaccinated using the fact sheets and CDC materials mentioned above. Family members can have a big impact on your residents' attitudes about vaccination.

As with the healthcare personnel and staff, the facility should track the reasons for residents (or decision makers on their behalf) for declining the vaccine and require the practitioner to document one-on-one counseling with the resident/decision maker. Ask the medical director to review the documented discussion as well. After providing one or more educational resources (video, informational flyer, FAQ document, etc.) to the resident/decision maker, re-approach and offer the vaccine again. Also, re-offer the vaccine to those who initially declined if an outbreak occurs in the facility and/or community rates of flu are increasing.

## **Address Barriers to Vaccination for Residents**

Barrier for Residents	Information and Techniques to Overcome the Barrier
Lack of requirement / regulation	Require all residents to be vaccinated with the flu vaccine annually.
Time for staff to administer vaccines	Allocate one or two staff members to provide vaccines on a given day. Contract with a pharmacy or vaccine provider to do this for free.
Costs of vaccines	<p>For residents, the cost of influenza vaccine is covered under Medicare Part B for eligible adults. Watch a one-minute video from CMS: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCQf-J2RLFY&amp;feature=em-uploademail-new">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCQf-J2RLFY&amp;feature=em-uploademail-new</a></p> <p>Influenza vaccine can be billed under the facilities' Medicare Roster Billing. <a href="https://www.cms.gov/medicare/preventive-services/roster-billing-mass-immunizers">https://www.cms.gov/medicare/preventive-services/roster-billing-mass-immunizers</a></p>
Lack of knowledge or misinformation about safety of vaccines	<p>Hold a "flu vaccine seminar" after a meal for residents to learn more about how the flu vaccine can protect their health and the health of their friends and fellow residents and dispel myths about vaccine safety. Allow time for questions.</p> <p>Hang posters and provide written material about the vaccine, its safety and its role in preventing flu outbreaks, especially during COVID-19.</p> <p>*Note that the use of LAIV4 (live attenuated vaccine) is not recommended for older adults</p>
Fear of the pain /trauma at the vaccination site	Offer acetaminophen to help mitigate aches/pains after immunization.
Consent issues residents	Obtain renewable informed consent upon admission for annual influenza vaccine.



## **Immunization of Visitors and Vendors**

Don't let your hard work be undone by a visitor bringing the flu into your facility. Consider requiring all vendors and visitors to have flu shots prior to coming to your facility this fall, especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic. This may be included as part of your reopening plan for visitors. Not only are you helping the facility by doing this, but the community at large.

Get an outside organization to hold an outdoor vaccine clinic on your property and invite family members and vendors to participate. If this is not possible, hang posters for visitors and vendors encouraging the vaccine, and provide them with resources for where they can get it.

## **Vaccine Storage and Administration**

It is important to note that your facility must have vaccine compatible storage, including appropriate medication refrigerators (not dorm style). Your facility needs to assess if it is capable of appropriate storage/administration to maintain vaccine efficacy. Low temperature/frozen vaccine handling may be out of scope for some long-term care facilities. You can find more information at the Immunization Action Coalition, [www.immunize.org](http://www.immunize.org).

## **Additional Resources:**

Flu Vaccination Resource Page from paltc.org

<https://paltc.org/flu-vaccination-resources-post-acute-and-long-term-care-settings>

Immunization Action Coalition

<https://www.immunize.org/>

National Adult Vaccine Program

<https://www.geron.org/programs-services/alliances-and-multi-stakeholder-collaborations/national-adult-vaccination-program>

Charting a Path to Increasing Immunization Rates in the Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Settings:

[https://www.geron.org/images/navp/pdfs/ImmunizRatesWP\\_FNL.pdf](https://www.geron.org/images/navp/pdfs/ImmunizRatesWP_FNL.pdf)

Menu of State Long-Term Care Facility Influenza Vaccination Laws

<https://www.cdc.gov/phlp/publications/topic/menus/ltcinfluenza/index.html>

CDC Vaccine Information Statements for Live and Inactivated Influenza Vaccines

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/flulive.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/flu.html>

Influenza and Vaccination Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/fluview/nursinghome/report1819/report/>

[https://www.cdc.gov/flu/fluview/hcp-coverage\\_1819estimates.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/fluview/hcp-coverage_1819estimates.htm)