



UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI  
MILLER SCHOOL  
of MEDICINE

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Seasonal Flu Vaccine

### Influenza Policy

#### **Where can I find the University of Miami's Influenza Vaccination Policy?**

The University's Influenza Vaccination Policy can be found at the [Flu Vaccine Website](#)

### Important Deadlines

#### **What are the deadlines to receive the flu vaccine and apply for exemptions?**

Important deadlines related to the Flu vaccine are located at the [Flu Vaccine Website](#)

### Employees Required to have the Flu Vaccine

#### **Which employees are required to receive the Flu Vaccine?**

All employees of the University of Miami Miller School Of Medicine and off site clinical facilities are required to adhere to the University's mandatory vaccination policy based upon their work location and job duties. This mandatory policy applies to all Healthcare Workers (HCWs) and staff that work in facilities where patient care is provided. At UHealth, HCWs are all those employees who have face-to-face contact (both clinical and non-clinical) with patients or those who work in patient care areas. This would include all MSOM (both Faculty and Staff) Hospital and Clinic workers regardless of location. A list of facilities that require the flu vaccine is found [here](#).

#### **What is considered patient care or clinical areas?**

These are defined by the physical or recognized borders of hospitals, clinics or other sites where clinical operations occur. These include but are not limited to inpatient and outpatient areas where patients may be seen, evaluated, treated or waiting to be seen. A list of facilities that require the flu vaccine is found [here](#). If you are unsure if you are required to have the Flu Vaccine, please contact your departmental Human Resources representative.

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### Masks and Hand Hygiene

#### **Why is wearing a mask and performing proper hand hygiene not enough to prevent flu transmission?**

HCWs have frequent contacts with high-risk patients in many settings. HCWs can serve as a vehicle to transmit influenza even when they do not have symptoms. These measures are not considered as reliable as vaccination in protecting our patients. However, please follow proper hand hygiene, the use of the appropriate personal protective equipment and cough etiquette to prevent the spread of the flu.

## **Importance of Being Vaccinated**

### **I am not involved in direct patient care. Why should I be vaccinated?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the vaccine for all persons over the age of 6 months, especially HCWs. Everyone, including laboratory, clerical, dietary and housekeeping employees as well as security, facilities, maintenance and administrative personnel might be exposed to the flu virus even though they are not directly involved in patient care, and could transmit the virus to others.

### **I am very healthy and never get the flu. Why should I get the flu vaccine?**

Working in a health care environment increases your risk of exposure. You may become infected and experience only mild symptoms but still pass the virus to patients, co-workers and members of your family.

### **I am very familiar with the symptoms of the flu, and I stay home when I am sick. Therefore, there is very little chance that I would infect my co-workers or patients. Why should I get the vaccine?**

The signs and symptoms of the flu may not appear for two to three days after you contract influenza, during which time you could unknowingly infect patients and co-workers.

### **How effective are flu vaccines, especially since virus strains keep changing?**

The flu vaccine is the most effective method to prevent influenza. The effectiveness of the vaccine depends on a number of factors, including the accuracy of the match between vaccine strains and circulating strains and the age and health of the recipient. Influenza vaccine does not protect against other respiratory viral infections that occur during winter months. Public health officials have a good track record of predicting the main flu strains that will cause the most illness during each flu season. These strains usually change each year, which is why the vaccine is given annually. Even if you get the flu from a strain of the virus that was not included in the vaccine, having the vaccine can make your illness milder.

### **Why isn't vaccination voluntary?**

Our highest priority must be to protect our patients, (many of whom are vulnerable to adverse outcomes) and the employees who serve them. Research clearly shows that flu vaccinations vastly increase mass immunity and protect immune-suppressed patients.

### **Can't I just take antiviral drugs if I get the flu?**

It is best to take precautions to prevent the flu with annual immunization. You can always seek treatment for the flu, but in the meantime, you may have already passed on the virus to patients and co-workers since viral shedding may occur up to two to three days prior to the appearance of symptoms. In addition, resistance to antiviral drugs can develop in circulating virus strains, therefore compromising the effectiveness of the drugs for people who need them the most—those at high risk for severe complications.

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## **About the Vaccine**

### **When should I be vaccinated?**

When the flu season is about to begin, you should get the vaccine as soon as possible. It takes about two

weeks to develop protection after receiving the vaccine. Please check with your respective Employee Health office for information about flu vaccination, including locations and times.

**Is it true that you can get the flu from the flu vaccine?**

**No**, you cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine. Some people mistakenly confuse flu symptoms with the vaccine side effects, such as a minor fever, etc. or they may have caught the flu *prior* to having the flu vaccine and have not developed signs and symptoms of the flu.

**Will the flu vaccine make me feel ill?**

Almost all people who receive the influenza vaccine have no serious problems. Some people may experience minor side effects. If these problems occur, they begin soon after the shot is given and usually last no more than one to two days. The most common side effects are:

- Soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given
- Low-grade fever and mild body aches

**Any HCW who believes that they are experiencing adverse effects related to the Flu vaccination should immediately seek medical attention and report this adverse event to the University of Miami's Workman's Compensation Clinic at:**

Office Phone: 305-689- 2667.

University of Miami Hospital

West Building, Suite 502

1321 NW 14th ST

Miami FL 33125

Hours: Mon – Friday 7am – 5pm

Website: <http://www.uhealthworkerscomp.com>

**I have an allergy to eggs. Should I get the flu vaccine?**

*We have egg free vaccine that we can offer to you.*

**I am pregnant. Should I get the flu vaccine?**

**Yes.** Pregnant women should receive the flu shot. It is especially important for pregnant women to get the flu shot, as you are more likely to have serious complications to yourself and your pregnancy if you get the flu. Once you get the flu shot, your body will start producing antibodies that will help protect you against the flu, and this protection can be passed to your unborn baby. According to the CDC, you can receive the flu shot at any time, during any trimester, while you are pregnant. Pregnant women should receive the injectable vaccine.

**What if I get vaccinated on my own through my doctor's office, a pharmacy, JMH, VA hospital, or another location other than at a University of Miami designated [location](#) or Benefits Fair?**

That is acceptable. If you receive the Flu vaccine elsewhere, including at a UM *personal* healthcare provider, JMH, VA hospital (considered outside facilities for the purposes of the flu vaccine administration) please upload your flu vaccine documentation at <https://is.gd/flu vaccine>

**Exemptions (Medical and Religious)**

**What about an individual who has medical or religious reasons for declining vaccination?**

An exemption to the vaccination policy may be requested for certain **medical** reasons, including documentation of severe allergy to the vaccine or components as defined by the most current recommendations of the [CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices \(ACIP\)](#).

Likewise, if receiving the vaccination conflicts with sincerely held beliefs, a request for **religious** accommodation can be made.

**What documentation do I need to provide to request a MEDICAL exemption?**

There are very few medical contraindications to receiving the flu vaccine. However, a HCW may apply for a medical exemption if he or she believes a vaccine would cause serious harm (e.g., if he or she has a documented history of a serious reaction to a previous flu vaccine). The HCW must have his or her healthcare provider complete the UHealth's Influenza Vaccination Request for MEDICAL Exemption Form and the HCW is responsible for requesting and returning the completed form to the Employee Health Office at [flu@miami.edu](mailto:flu@miami.edu). Request must be submitted by the publicized dates at the [Flu Vaccine Website](#)

**My RELIGION requires me to decline vaccination. What should I do?**

A HCW whose religion prohibits vaccinations may apply for an exemption. A HCW seeking a religious exemption must submit the completed form, along with any supporting documentation, to Mr. Roy Hinds in the Human Resources Department of Workforce Equity and Performance at [wep@miami.edu](mailto:wep@miami.edu). Supporting documentation is any documentation that supports the worker's belief that religion prohibits him or her from obtaining the flu vaccine. Examples of supporting documentation are a letter from a religious leader or a quote from a religious text along with a letter from the HCW explaining the relevance of the text and/or a sworn affidavit confirming that the worker has never exposed him/herself to any vaccinations. Request must be submitted by the publicized dates at the [Flu Vaccine Website](#)

**I received a medical exemption last year. Do I have to submit the paperwork again this year?**

If you received a "permanent" exemption, you are not required to apply again this year. If you received a "temporary" exemption, you are required to reapply for a medical exemption and email it to [flu@miami.edu](mailto:flu@miami.edu) found at the [Flu Vaccine Website](#) under "Important Dates."

**I received a RELIGIOUS I exemption last year. Do I have to submit the paperwork again this year?**

**Yes.** If you received a Religious exemption last year, you are required to submit a NEW application this flu season to [wep@miami.edu](mailto:wep@miami.edu) found at the [Flu Vaccine Website](#) under "Important Dates."

**If my declination for medical or religious reasons is approved, will I still be able to work?**

**Yes.** Unlike previous Flu seasons, you will not be required to wear a mask because you did not receive your flu vaccine. However, if you are ill with the flu, you should NOT provide care or have contact with patients. Also, all caregivers, regardless of vaccination status, should wear a mask if they have respiratory symptoms of the flu when they are taking care of a patient.

## Compliance

**What happens if I do not want to get the vaccine?**

Employees who are required to have the Flu Vaccine and who do not receive the vaccine by the publicized deadline or who do not have an approved exemption (medical or religious) will be placed on a **7-day unpaid leave** (those with available vacation time must use vacation pay during the leave). During this time, the HCW will have access to additional educational information regarding prevention of influenza, and will have the opportunity to be vaccinated at any point during the 7-day leave. This is a disciplinary matter that will be recorded in the employee's file.

HCWs who do not obtain the flu vaccine by [the required deadline](#) will be precluded from accessing any area where patient care is provided and from providing patient care and will be disciplined up to and

including termination (Faculty will be disciplined pursuant to the terms of the Faculty Manual).

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**What professional associations support required influenza vaccination among health care personnel?**

- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American College of Physicians
- American Hospital Association
- American Medical Directors Association
- American Pharmacists Association
- American Public Health Association
- Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology
- Infectious Diseases Society of America
- National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO)
- National Foundation for Infectious Diseases
- National Patient Safety Foundation
- Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America
- Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Department of Veterans Affairs

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

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**More Information Regarding Influenza**

**Where can I get more information about Influenza?**

Influenza: [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)

Influenza-Related Questions & Answers by Topic:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/fag/index.htm>

Influenza Vaccination Information for Health Care Workers:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/healthcareworkers.htm>