



## UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Washington, DC 20415

The Director

Wednesday, September 25, 2013

### **MEMORANDUM FOR: Heads Of Executive Departments And Agencies**

**FROM:** Kathleen Sebelius Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Elaine Kaplan, Acting Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management

**Subject:** Immunization of Federal Workers with 2013-14 Seasonal Influenza Vaccine

Keeping the federal workforce healthy is a top priority. Flu season is right around the corner and once again poses a health threat to many Americans. Certain populations, such as pregnant women, young children, older people, and those with chronic conditions are at greater risk for serious complications if they get the flu. But even healthy people can get—and, more importantly, spread—this virus to anyone they come into contact with. As the agencies responsible for federal workforce polices and for protecting the health of all Americans, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are again coordinating efforts to reduce the spread of flu virus in our workplaces and communities.

The best protection against influenza is an annual flu vaccination. Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, most Americans with private health insurance and those with Medicare can get vaccinated against the flu and other serious illnesses with no out-of-pocket cost. Employees and their families enrolled in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program can also be immunized through their health plans at no out-of-pocket cost. Many health plans make flu vaccine available in pharmacies and other convenient community locations. Federal departments and agencies are also improving access to flu vaccine through their occupational health clinics.

Everyone should receive the flu vaccine, and not just those at high risk for serious complications. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, virtually everyone can benefit and protect not only themselves, but also those they are in contact with. With few exceptions, all persons six months of age and older should receive a flu vaccination every year before flu season is in full swing.

In addition to the flu vaccine, there are things we can do each day to help prevent the spread of flu and other illnesses:

- frequently wash your hands using soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizing rub;
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth;
- try to stay away from sick people when possible;
- get plenty of sleep, exercise, eat well, and drink lots of fluids; and

- when you cough or sneeze, cover your nose or mouth with a tissue (not a reusable handkerchief) and throw it away when you are finished.

It is also vital to foster a workplace environment that encourages our employees to stay home when they are sick to limit transmission of influenza and other illnesses this season. It may be difficult to tell the difference between influenza and a common cold. While both illnesses may cause a runny nose and a cough and/or sore throat, symptoms like tiredness, headaches/body aches, and fever over 100 degrees are more common with the flu. Although someone could have the flu without a fever, encouraging employees to stay home until they have been fever-free for 24 hours (without fever-reducing medication) is recommended.

Please remind your employees about the availability of flu vaccine, as well as the importance of maintaining a healthy workplace. This is also a great opportunity to highlight other vaccines recommended for adults that can prevent a number of illnesses besides influenza. Please urge employees to discuss updating their immunizations with their health care provider.

Additional flu prevention information is available online at [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov). This site features flu prevention tips, public service announcements, and posters. Also, a vaccine finder tool on [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov) can help employees and their families locate places in their communities where they can get vaccinated for the flu and other diseases.

We encourage you to visit [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov) and become familiar with the many resources your employees and their families can use. Thank you for the valuable work you do and for helping to ensure a healthy work environment for all.