



Office of the
Director

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

Friday, September 25, 2015

MEMORANDUM FOR: HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

FROM: Sylvia M. Burwell, Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Beth F. Cobert, Acting Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Subject: Protecting Our Federal Workforce During the 2015-16 Flu Season

Please help us ensure all federal employees take action to reduce the spread of influenza in the workplace, among our families, and in our communities. The best way to do this is to encourage everyone to get the annual flu vaccine—it can prevent influenza illness and reduce time lost from work and school, as well as preventing hospitalizations and deaths. Vaccination is particularly important for people at high risk for serious flu complications, and their close contacts.

Last year, we experienced some challenges during the flu season, with high levels of illness. Last year's vaccine offered reduced protection against the most prevalent flu virus because it had evolved to be significantly different than the viruses used to make last season's vaccine. Flu vaccines have been reformulated this year and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends everyone 6 months and older be vaccinated. Beyond preventing the flu, the vaccine also can decrease the severity of illness among those who are infected. People who get the flu vaccine are also less likely to need treatment for flu complications, in turn reducing the use of antibiotics that may lead to resistance that makes these drugs less effective.

To help make flu vaccination more accessible and convenient federal employees and their family members can receive a free influenza vaccine through their Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) plan. Most FEHB plans cover flu shots at pharmacies and retail stores, in addition to doctor's offices and clinics. Additionally, many federal agencies offer flu shots onsite at no or low cost.

Along with promoting immunization, please reinforce with your managers and employees that we can minimize the spread of flu in the workplace. For consistency, we provided the enclosed email text for you to send out to your supervisors and employees. Please do this no later than October 5, 2015.

Thank you for helping to ensure a healthier workforce through timely immunization.

Enclosures

*Proposed Email for All Staff. **Select appropriate statement pertaining to availability of flu shots at your agency.***

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to encourage you to get your annual flu vaccine. It can prevent illness and reduce time lost from work and school, as well as prevent hospitalizations and deaths. People who get the flu vaccine are also less likely to need treatment for flu complications, in turn reducing the use of antibiotics that may lead to resistance that makes these drugs less effective.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends everyone 6 months and older be vaccinated against the flu this year because beyond preventing the flu, it also can decrease the severity of illness among those who are infected. Vaccination is particularly important for people at high risk for serious flu complications and their close contacts.

To help make immunization more accessible and convenient, federal employees and their family members can receive a free influenza vaccine through their Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) plan. Most FEHB plans cover flu shots at pharmacies and retail stores, in addition to doctor's offices and clinics. ***Our agency also has flu vaccines available onsite. Please check for details. -or- Consider making flu vaccination a family affair by taking your loved ones with you to these convenient locations.***

Again, timely flu vaccination is the best way to prevent the flu. Other tips include:

- Wash your hands frequently and follow proper etiquette for coughs and sneezes;
- Stay home if you develop symptoms of the flu and avoid shaking hands with anyone who might be ill;
- Review additional resources on vaccines.gov, flu.gov, and CDC.gov; and
- Take the adult vaccination quiz to learn more about all of the vaccines you need as adults.

Thank you for helping to ensure a healthier you as well as a healthier workforce!

Sincerely,

[Sign Name]

Proposed Email for All Supervisors (to be sent after the first email):

Dear Colleagues,

I sent you an email to encourage you to get your annual flu vaccine, and for you to encourage your employees to do so as well. Along with promoting immunization, please plan now for possible illnesses by:

- reviewing telework, flexible work schedules, and leave options that may be available to employees;
- updating employee contact information;
- refreshing emergency plans to ensure continuity of operations; and
- ensuring that you know your agency's contingency role in a severe flu outbreak.

Thank you for all that you do to manage our workforce.

Sincerely,

[Sign Name]