



OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

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MEMORANDUM FOR CHIEF HUMAN CAPITAL OFFICERS

FROM: LINDA M. SPRINGER 
DIRECTOR

Subject: Influenza and Federal Agency Response

On November 1, 2005, the Federal Government announced its comprehensive national strategy for preparing for a possible flu pandemic. At this time, since the avian flu presents no immediate threat, the high level of interest in flu protection provides an ideal opportunity to educate the Federal family about protection against the seasonal flu.

Each year, more than 200,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized due to complications caused by the seasonal flu, and approximately 36,000 people die. Seasonal flu viruses are spread easily from person to person, but the available flu vaccine provides a high level of protection for most people.

Many Federal agencies offer free flu vaccines for employees. It is important to communicate the low risks and high benefits of this vaccine, in order to maximize employee immunization levels. Last year the U.S. faced a shortage in seasonal flu vaccine; this year there is no projected shortage. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently issued guidance broadening the recommendations for immunization beyond high risk groups (<http://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/pressrel/r051024.htm>).

Enrollees in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHB) may choose to receive the vaccine from their healthcare provider, as may family members who are also enrolled. Antiviral medications, when appropriately prescribed, may be covered under employees' FEHB plans. Employees should check their plan brochure for specifics about coverage and payment. The flu shot is also being offered widely this year in more public places, like grocery stores and pharmacies. For employees who are enrolled in a Health Care Flexible Spending Account through FSAFEDS (<http://www.fsafeds.gov>), any out-of-pocket health care expenses incurred to pay for the flu vaccine are eligible expenses under FSAFEDS.

Further information about the seasonal flu as well as the possible threat of a flu pandemic is available on the Internet at:

The CDC Flu website: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>

Includes "Preventing the Flu" <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/preventing.htm>; "Key Facts About Influenza and the Influenza Vaccine" <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>; and "Stopping Germs at Home, Work, and School" http://www.cdc.gov/germstopper/home_work_school.htm.

The Department of Health and Human Services website: <http://www.hhs.gov/flu>

Includes "How Does Seasonal Flu Differ From Pandemic Flu?"

http://www.hhs.gov/flu/season_or_pandemic.html and an interactive health tutorial about the flu <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tutorials/influenza/htm/index.htm>.

The Federal Government's pandemic flu/avian flu website: <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>

cc: Human Resources Directors