

Reducing Healthcare-associated Infections: The Campaign for Healthcare Employee Immunizations

In 2006, the Iowa Healthcare Collaborative (IHC) began a four-year campaign to increase the number of hospital employees receiving a yearly influenza vaccination as part of the effort to curb healthcare-associated infections (HAIs). With an original goal of 95% of hospital employees immunized by 2010, the campaign has seen a rise each year in the overall percentage of immunized employees. Through the efforts and diligence of hospital staff across the state, Iowa hospitals achieved an immunization rate in the 2008-2009 campaign nearly double the national average of 44%. Newly included in this Iowa Report are hospital-specific immunization rates.

With the support of our Healthcare-Associated Infections Workgroup, IHC has taken a position encouraging hospitals to mandate that their employees receive influenza vaccinations. To aid hospitals across the state in implementing this policy, as well as providing tips on achieving the 95% goal, IHC has updated its immunization toolkit. It includes information, resources and strategies to assist healthcare facilities in immunizing their employees. The toolkit is available online at <http://www.ihconline.org/toolkits/immunizationhealthcareworkers.cfm>.

Beginning in the Fall 2009, IHC moves into its next six-month healthcare worker immunization campaign. Because H1N1 represents an additional threat to the public, vaccination for healthcare workers continues to be very important to preventing the spread of illness, but also to ensuring the state's healthcare workforce is ready to respond to all types of illness outbreaks. Iowa hospitals' employees understand these threats and are committed to maintaining a high-level of readiness in response to these challenges.

SUCCESS SNAPSHOT

Stamping Out Influenza: Two Hospitals Improve Their Employee Immunization Rates

University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics

With an emphasis on improving the safety of their patients, the University of Iowa Hospitals and clinics (UIHC) has continuously undertaken the challenge to improve their employee vaccination rate. Over the past several years, the hospital has successfully increased the number of employees annually immunized against seasonal influenza. "We have seen our vaccination rates improve considerably in the past few years. We have an interdisciplinary staff influenza vaccination workgroup that meets year round and members take their responsibility very seriously," says Vicki Ibarra, RN, Quality Management Coordinator.

With the support of Administration, UIHC has taken the following steps to further increase the number of healthcare workers who receive their annual influenza vaccine: increasing accessibility to the vaccine through 24/7 vaccination sites; electronically tracking those staff receiving or declining flu shots; marketing and education through posters, screen savers, news publications, and stickers; and administrative support to maintain an emphasis on the importance of vaccination to patient safety.

UIHC also put a policy into place, where all employees are required to either be vaccinated or sign a formal declination form. "With this policy, our rates went up about 14%," says Mrs. Ibarra.

For the 2009-10 campaign, UIHC will move one step further and implement a mandatory employee vaccination policy for both seasonal and H1N1 influenza vaccinations.

Cherokee Regional Medical Center

In 2008, Cherokee Regional Medical Center (CRMC) made a serious commitment to increasing the number of employees who receive a yearly influenza vaccination when just 67% of employees received the shot the previous year. An enthusiastic effort was made to promote CRMC's Flu Vaccine Program, with a particular emphasis on employee education.

"Information highlighting the reasons to receive the influenza vaccine was put in all employee paychecks to ensure that everyone knew about the program, and that you could infect others with the virus and not be sick yourself," said Susie Haselhoff, RN, Infection Control. "We also wrote an informational article in our hospital newsletter 'Highlights', and posters promoting the program were displayed throughout the hospital." Those employees choosing not to receive the vaccine were required to sign a waiver and encouraged to attend an educational session on the importance of immunization.

Leadership support was also crucial to success at CRMC. Managers were strongly encouraged to lead by example in getting their flu vaccine and were expected to strongly encourage their departmental staff to get the flu vaccine. "Our CEO has also supported our efforts by receiving the flu vaccine and by providing financial support for our time and prizes," said Haselhoff. Employees who received their flu shot were eligible for a cash prize drawing to further encourage participation in the Flu Vaccine Program.

The staff at CRMC also utilized the toolkit provided by the Iowa Healthcare Collaborative (IHC) and its list of mentor hospitals within the state. "Brenda Schwan at Winneshiek Medical Center shared their ideas and was a good sounding board," said Haselhoff.

“Thanks to the team effort of Administration, Occupational Health, and Infection Control, 94% of employees at CRMC received their annual flu shot in our last campaign,” said Rita Comstock, RN, Specialty Clinic Nurse Manager.