

The New Jersey Department of Health asks that you share the below information with health care staff to assist in flu prevention efforts.



New Jersey is experiencing widespread influenza activity. The New Jersey Department of Health recommends that all health care personnel (HCP) get vaccinated annually against influenza. Flu activity is difficult to predict. It is impossible to say in advance precisely when the 2017 – 2018 flu season will peak or end, how severe it will be, or what viruses will circulate over the course of the flu season.

It is not too late to get vaccinated. When HCP get vaccinated, not only are they protected, but they also protect those who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness, like babies and young children, older people, and people with certain illnesses. While flu vaccine is not perfect, and some people who get vaccinated get flu, there is some data to suggest that flu vaccination may make illness milder. A 2017 study in *Clinical Infectious Diseases* showed that influenza vaccination reduced deaths, intensive care unit admissions, intensive care unit length of stay, and overall duration of hospitalization among hospitalized influenza patients.

According to data available from the National Healthcare Safety Network for the 2016 – 2017 season, 83.5% of hospital-based HCP in New Jersey were vaccinated against influenza, compared with 87.6% for the nation.

The New Jersey Department of Health also urges all HCP to continue to vaccinate their patients against influenza. Flu vaccines are safe and effective. A HCP recommendation plays a critical role in a patient's decision to be immunized. Influenza vaccine is recommended for all people 6 months of age and older. Pregnant women should be vaccinated during any trimester of their pregnancy to protect themselves and their newborn babies from flu.

All HCP should stay home if they are experiencing symptoms of influenza so that they do not expose their vulnerable patients. HCP should also encourage their patients to stay home from work and school when they are sick. Influenza viruses are spread mainly by droplet when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. Less often, a person might get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth or nose. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. Children may pass the virus for longer. That means you may be able to infect others with the flu virus before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. People should cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and practice good hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub.

For additional information, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov or the New Jersey Department of Health website at <http://nj.gov/health/cd/topics/flu.shtml>.