

Study shows workplace benefits of influenza vaccination in 50-64 year olds

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Workers age 50-64 who received influenza vaccine lost substantially fewer days of work and worked fewer days while ill, according to a new study in the Feb. 1 issue of *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, now available online. Given the concerns about antiviral drug resistance among this year's flu strains, the study highlights the importance of vaccination to prevent influenza.

The burden of influenza-like illnesses during the flu season is significant in working adults between the ages of 50 and 64. Uncertainty regarding the impact of the flu as well as the benefits of vaccination may contribute to low vaccination rates in that segment of the population.

The new study included 497 people, 404 of whom received an influenza vaccination. An influenza-like illness was reported by 17.1 percent of the study participants and was responsible for 39 percent of all work days lost. On average, the individuals were sick for eight days, missed one and a half days of work, and worked for four days while still symptomatic. Additionally, 30 percent visited a health care provider. The symptoms of illness appeared more severe in unvaccinated individuals, although the differences were not statistically significant.

Among unvaccinated study participants, influenza-like illnesses were associated with 45 percent of all days of illness during the flu season. However, with vaccination, a substantial reduction of almost 45 percent in the risk of illness was observed as well as a reduction of more than 60 percent in the numbers of days of illness, work loss, working while ill,

and days in bed.

According to study author Kristin Nichol, MD, of the Minneapolis Veterans Affairs Medical Center, "The implications are that the prevention of influenza-like illnesses can have a huge impact on the health and work productivity of adults 50 to 64, and we should do more to make sure that this high priority group is vaccinated. It is a win-win for the worker with fewer illnesses, days of illness, days in bed, etc. and for the employer with improved worker productivity."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently reported high rates of resistance to the popular antiviral drug oseltamivir in one of this year's flu strains. "Given the concerns about antiviral resistance," Dr. Nichol said, "this study is a reminder of the importance of influenza vaccine. It's not too late to get your flu shot."

Source: Infectious Diseases Society of America

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