

When hospital workers get vaccines, community flu rates fall

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For every 15 healthcare providers who receive the influenza vaccination, one fewer person in the community will contract an influenza-like illness, according to a study using California public health data from 2009 – 2012.

In an abstract that will be presented on June 7 at the 41st Annual Conference of the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC), a researcher analyzed archival data from the California Department of Public Health to determine the relationship between vaccinating healthcare personnel against influenza and the rate of influenza-like illness in the surrounding community.

"This study suggests that there is a strong connection between how many healthcare personnel are vaccinated against the flu and how many cases of influenza-like illnesses are reported in the community," said James F. Marx, PhD, RN, CIC, investigator and founder of Broad Street Solutions, an infection prevention consultancy. "More research would be helpful to further understand the impact of vaccinating healthcare workers on community influenza rates."

For the 2011-2012 influenza season, the influenza vaccination rate of California hospital healthcare personnel was 68 percent. According to Marx, if 90 percent of California healthcare personnel were vaccinated – the goal set by the federal government's Healthy People 2020 initiative – there would be about 30,000 fewer cases of influenza-like illness in California.

Influenza-like illness causes more than 200,000 hospitalizations each year and, on average, 24,000 people die as a result, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Currently, vaccination is the single best way to prevent the flu.

Marx said: "It is critical that [healthcare providers](#) receive the flu vaccine since they come into contact with our most vulnerable community members."

Beginning last flu season, the County of Los Angeles was one of 12 California counties that began requiring healthcare personnel to receive the influenza vaccination or wear protective masks. APIC recommends that all healthcare personnel – in acute care hospitals, long-term care and other facilities – require annual influenza immunization as a condition of employment unless there are compelling medical contraindications. Read the APIC position paper on influenza vaccination.

"Efforts to promote [influenza vaccination](#) of healthcare personnel have traditionally focused on protecting patients inside healthcare facilities," said APIC 2014 President Jennie Mayfield, BSN, MPH, CIC. "Now we have evidence that through enhanced healthcare worker vaccination we can protect the broader community. This represents a tremendous [public health](#) opportunity."

More information: Oral Abstract #426 – Relationship Between Hospital Healthcare Personnel Influenza Vaccination Rates and Community Influenza Rates in California, Saturday, June 7, 2:00-2:15 p.m.

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