

Required Influenza Vaccination

Questions and Answers

The Seasonal Influenza Vaccination is required of all employees, volunteers, students and applicable non-employees. Vaccinations are free to all who provide service to the organization.

1. Why is the University of Toledo Health requiring influenza vaccinations?

The University of Toledo Medical Center (UTMC) wants to provide the safest environment possible for patients and their families, employees, and visitors to our facilities. Requiring vaccinations will help protect patients, employees and others from the seasonal flu. The medical staff at UTMC is also in support of requiring the flu vaccine.

2. When will this new policy go into effect?

The policy change became effective during the 2015/2016 influenza season. For the 2020/2021 season, all vaccinations are required prior to November 3, 2020. This season's exemption request for medical and religious reasons must be received before the end of the calendar day October 15, 2020, allowing notification to the employee by October 31, 2020.

****Please note: employees working at a satellite location in any capacity must complete their immunization or exemption requests by October 15, 2020.**

3. Is it possible to have an exemption from the vaccination?

Yes. An individual may request a medical or religious exemption. A Request for Medical or Religious Exemption form must be filled out completely and supporting documentation provided. This request must be submitted to the Occupational Health Department via fax to 419-530-1313 or email to influenza@utoledo.edu by end of the calendar day October 15, 2020 in accordance with the information in item two above. The exemption form is located on the UTMC Influenza website (<https://influenza.utoledo.edu/>) after login information is entered. Request for medical exemption requires documentation from a physician stating the medical condition prohibiting the vaccination. Request for religious exemption requires certification of a sincerely held religious belief against vaccination.

4. If an individual receives a medical or religious exemption does she/he have to follow any special precautions when working in patient care areas?

Yes. Typically, those who received medical or religious exemption in the past were always required to wear a mask in any geographic location where there might be contact with UTMC patients, families or other Health Science Campus personnel and still holds true this season. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic everyone is required to wear a mask and eye protection during patient or family and other UTMC personnel interactions. Masks must be worn according to manufacture recommendations and if the employee has interaction with patients or patient families the mask will be provided by UTMC. It is recommended that masks are changed every 4 hours or when moist or soiled.

5. Will a new medical or religious exemption need to be submitted each year?

Yes. A new Exemption Request form is required each year.

6. I never come in contact with patients. Why do I have to get a flu shot?

Even people who don't have direct contact with patients do have contact with caregivers. Thus, you can inadvertently start a chain of infection and spread the flu to coworkers, caregivers, patients and others.

7. I've never had the flu. I've never had the shot. Why do I have to receive the vaccination?

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Infectious Disease Physicians, American Pediatric Association, American Academy of Family Physicians and many other medical experts and professional organizations strongly advocate for annual flu vaccination to promote safety for our patients and colleagues. There are documented cases of patient mortality due to hospital acquired flu infections.

8. Is it a HIPAA violation/confidentiality breach to disclose vaccination/exemption information to department management?

Vaccination or exemption information may be shared on a need-to-know basis. HIPAA permits sharing this information as part of healthcare operations, which generally include those activities we perform to improve the quality of care delivered to patients.

9. Why should I get the vaccination when it is first offered?

CDC recommends that people get a flu vaccine by the end of October. The CDC does not recommend getting the vaccine too early (e.g., July or August) because it is likely to be associated with reduced protection against the flu later in the season. It generally takes 2 weeks after vaccination to increase your immunity to the highest level after receiving the vaccine. Therefore, vaccination as soon as possible will help the organization's workforce achieve maximum immunity before the peak flu season arrives.

10. Can the vaccine cause influenza?

No. The injectable (inactivated) cannot cause influenza. The injectable influenza vaccine contains only killed viruses and cannot cause influenza disease. Fewer than 1 percent of people who are vaccinated develop influenza-like symptoms, such as mild fever and muscle aches, after vaccination. These side effects are not the same as having the actual disease. Consequently, the vaccine cannot produce influenza disease.

11. If someone feels ill, should they get the flu vaccination?

People who are moderately or severely ill should usually wait until they recover before getting the flu vaccine. If you are ill, talk to your doctor about whether to reschedule receiving the vaccination. People with a mild illness can usually get the vaccine.

12. Can I get vaccinated from another facility besides UTMC?

Yes. However, you must provide documentation of the date and alternate location where you were vaccinated. Proof of vaccination must be uploaded after login into the Flu Program website, located at: <https://influenza.utoledo.edu/> prior to November 2, 2020 for the current flu season. Remember, the flu shot is free here at UTMC.

13. Can family members receive a vaccination from UTMC Occupational Health?

Not at this time. Though it is highly recommended that healthcare providers' family members get vaccinated.

14. What if someone dislikes needles? Will Occupational Health offer employees the option of using the nasal spray instead of the flu shot?

The CDC says that the nasal-spray flu vaccine is fine for healthy people ages 2 through 49 who are not pregnant. However, the agency recommends healthcare workers caring for people with severely weakened immune systems who require a protected hospital environment should get the flu shot rather than the nasal spray.

15. I am allergic to eggs, can I get the flu vaccine?

Occupational Health is offering a vaccine called Flublok. **Vaccine viruses for Flublok® are not propagated in eggs. The vaccine can be considered egg-free, making it an alternative for anyone who has an allergy to eggs.** Please see the Medical Exemption Request form for additional information and speak with your physician to see if this is a good alternative vaccine for you.

16. What if an employee has an adverse reaction after the flu shot?

Localized reactions are normal and include redness or a sore arm. If you feel you are having a severe reaction seek immediate treatment at the Emergency Department or with your Primary Care Provider. Notify Occupational Health if your provider diagnoses you as having a **severe** reaction by calling 419-383-5598.

17. How safe is this vaccine?

The influenza vaccine is very safe and has been given since 1943. The most common side effects include soreness, redness, and/or swelling at the site of the injection. These reactions are generally mild and go away on their own within a few days and only occur in 15-20 percent of recipients. Less than 1 percent of recipients of either form of vaccine develop symptoms such as fever, chills and

muscle aches for one to two days following the vaccination. These symptoms are more likely to occur in a person who has never been exposed to the influenza virus or vaccine. Experiencing these nonspecific side effects does not mean that you are getting influenza. Serious adverse reactions to either vaccine are very rare. Check the following website for more information:

<http://www.utoledo.edu/fluprep/>.

18. I am pregnant. Am I exempt from receiving the flu vaccine?

No. According to the CDC, you can receive the flu shot any time, during any trimester while you are pregnant. Pregnant women should receive the flu shot because they are more likely to have serious complications if they get the flu. If you're pregnant, once you get the flu shot, your body will start producing antibodies that will help protect you against the flu, and this protection can be passed to your unborn baby. For more information visit the CDC: [Pregnant Women & Influenza](#).

19. Who should employees contact if they have any questions?

Employees should contact their manager/supervisor, Occupational Health or Human Resources.

20. Will a flu vaccine protect me against COVID-19?

Getting a flu vaccine will not protect against COVID-19, however there are many important [benefits](#) in receiving the flu vaccination. Flu vaccines have been shown to reduce the risk of flu illness, hospitalization and death. Getting a flu vaccine this fall will be more important than ever, not only to reduce your risk from flu but also to help conserve potentially scarce health care resources.

21. Should a flu vaccine be given to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19?

No. Vaccination should be deferred (postponed) for people with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, regardless of whether they have symptoms, until they have met the [criteria](#) to discontinue their isolation. While mild illness is not a contraindication to flu vaccination, vaccinations should be postponed in these individuals to avoid exposing healthcare personnel and other patients to the virus that causes COVID-19.

Reference:

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/season/faq-flu-season-2020-2021.htm>