



## PREVENTION OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE BIG SKY

### Consensus Statement on Required Influenza Immunization of All Healthcare Personnel in Montana

*Montana Public Health* occasionally publishes consensus statements that support the mission of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. In September 2013, "Consensus Statement on the Testing for *Clostridium Difficile* in Montana" was published. In this issue, we present a consensus statement on required influenza immunization of all healthcare personnel (HCP) in Montana. This statement is timely and consistent with action required in 19 states and the District of Columbia for healthcare employers to have mandatory immunization policies.

**Summary:** All HCP in Montana without medical contraindications should be required to be immunized against seasonal and pandemic influenza as a condition of employment, unpaid service, and receipt of professional privileges.

#### Background:

- Influenza is a source of significant morbidity and mortality. Each year in the U.S., influenza causes an average of 225,000 hospitalizations and 35,000 deaths.
- Annual influenza immunization is the most effective method known for preventing influenza virus infection and related complications. Immunization also decreases the likelihood of transmitting influenza virus to others.
- Persons at high-risk of influenza-related complications often come in close contact with HCP in outpatient, inpatient, and long-term care settings.
- HCP can transmit influenza virus to patients before the onset of symptoms or while symptomatic.
- Influenza virus infection leads to HCP absenteeism and "presenteeism" (working while symptomatic), resulting in a substantial cost burden to the healthcare system.
- Previous studies have demonstrated that immunizing HCP against influenza decreases the rate of transmission of influenza virus from HCP to patients, related morbidity and mortality, and HCP absenteeism.
- Since 1981, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has recommended all HCP be immunized annually against influenza, yet HCP immunization rates remain low. For the 2011–2012 influenza season, only about 65% of HCP were estimated to be immunized against influenza.
- Voluntary programs to increase HCP immunization rates are not effective at achieving high immunization rates. In comparison, mandatory immunization policies result in high immunization rates among HCP.

#### Recommendations:

1. Each healthcare institution in Montana should develop its own policy requiring all HCP (including paid workers and volunteers) be immunized against seasonal and pandemic influenza as a condition of employment, unpaid service, or receipt of professional privileges.
2. HCP with medical contraindication(s) to receiving the influenza vaccine should be granted an exemption. A universal form explicitly listing the acceptable medical contraindications should be used to document the exemption.
3. HCP not immunized against influenza because of medical exemptions or vaccine refusal should be required to wear a mask while at work during influenza season.
4. Montana state government should mandate all healthcare institutions in the state have mandatory influenza immunization policies for their HCP.
5. Each healthcare facility in Montana should develop a comprehensive strategy for immunizing HCP against influenza, including the use of disease education and influenza vaccine education.
6. Each healthcare facility should establish easily accessible immunization sites and ensure HCP have access to those sites.

**Endorsed by:**

Montana Chapter of the Association for Professionals  
in Infection Control and Epidemiology on  
October 1, 2013

Montana Chapter of the American Academy of  
Pediatrics on September 26, 2013

Montana Hospital Association on September 13, 2013

Montana Infectious Diseases Society on  
September 10, 2013

David Christianson, MD  
Jeffrey Tjaden, MD  
Ray Geyer, DO  
Donald Skillman, MD

Montana Healthcare Associated Infection Prevention  
Initiative (MHAIFI) Roundtable on July 23, 2013

Casey Blumenthal, MHSA, RN  
Christy Fuller  
Deborah Gibson  
Laura Goldhahn  
Kirsten Kammerzell  
Kathryn Larsen, RN  
Joel Merriman, MPH  
Karl Milhon  
Erin Minnerath, MSPH  
Randall Nett, MD, MPH  
Tamara Powers, RN  
Tom Richardson, PharmD  
Chad Spangler, PhD  
Jeffrey Tjaden, MD  
Kimberly Van Wyk, PharmD  
Laurie Ward  
Pam Webb, RN, MPH

**Recommendations concerning required influenza immunizations for healthcare personnel in Montana.**

1. Each healthcare facility in Montana should develop a comprehensive strategy for immunizing healthcare personnel (HCP) against influenza, including the use of disease education and influenza vaccine education.
2. Each healthcare facility in Montana should develop its own policy requiring all HCP (including paid workers and volunteers) be immunized against seasonal and pandemic influenza as a condition of employment, unpaid service, or receipt of professional privileges.

**References:**

1. Infectious Disease Society of America (IDSA). IDSA policy on mandatory immunization of health care workers against seasonal and pandemic influenza. July 28, 2010.
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3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Prevention and control of influenza with vaccines: recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), 2010. MMWR. 2010;59(RR08):1–62.
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1400 Broadway  
Helena, MT 59620-2951

Richard Opper, Director, DPHHS  
Steven Helgerson, MD, MPH, State Med. Officer  
Jane Smilie, MPH, Administrator, PHSD