



# 2016-17 Influenza Immunization Policy

## Frequently Asked Questions



To help ensure the health and safety of our patients, visitors and employees, Cedars-Sinai is implementing its flu vaccination policy as flu season approaches. **Our expectation is that all healthcare workers will be vaccinated** for the flu, and we are striving to exceed the 93 percent vaccination rate that we reached for all employees last year.

All employees, medical staff, vendors, contracted personnel, volunteers, faculty and students must get their annual flu vaccination by Oct. 14, 2016.

#### **Those who decline the vaccine:**

**Will not be permitted in patient care areas or on the main medical center campus.** This includes staff working in the Davis Research Building, Steven Spielberg Building, Thaliens and the research floors of the Advanced Health Sciences Pavilion.

If you are employed in a patient-care area and decline the vaccine, you will be re-assigned to another area, if possible. **If management is unable to assign you to another work area, you will not be able to work.** You will be able to use your VHT hours in order to be paid, or you can take unpaid leave. However, you must make yourself available to work if you are provided another work assignment.

#### **Will we be given the flu “badge buddies” this year?**

Yes, we are issuing badge buddies again, and they must be visibly worn throughout the entire flu season, beginning Nov. 1. If you are vaccinated, you will receive a green badge buddy at the time of vaccination. If you decline vaccination, you will be given an orange badge buddy once you have submitted your declination form and completed the online 2016-17 flu school course on HealthStream. The badge buddies are different this year so you will not be able to wear last year's badge buddy.

#### **Does this policy apply to the patient-care areas of Cedars-Sinai Medical Network?**

The flu vaccine policy applies system-wide, including in patient-care areas operated by the Cedars-Sinai Medical Network. Our expectation is that **all** healthcare workers will be vaccinated for the flu.

#### **Are isolation masks required in administrative areas?**

No, isolation masks are not required to be worn in non-patient-care areas such as administrative offices.

#### **Why is Cedars-Sinai maintaining its flu vaccination policy?**

Patient safety is our most important goal, and we are striving to exceed the 93 percent vaccination rate that we achieved last year. We would like to ensure that we are doing everything possible to protect our staff, their families, our patients and co-workers from getting the

flu. **It is well documented that unvaccinated healthcare workers can spread the flu even when they don't have symptoms.** Our policy is in keeping with the County of Los Angeles Public Health Order issued in 2013.

#### **Why do we have to wear badges to identify whether or not we were vaccinated?**

The badge accessories (e.g., “badge buddies”) are the easiest method we have to ensure that all employees are in compliance with the policy and the County of Los Angeles Public Health Order. They are intended as a means to identify those who need to wear a mask while in patient care areas during flu season, per the County of Los Angeles Public Health Order.

#### **If I wear the badge, isn't that a HIPAA violation?**

No, it is not a HIPAA violation. The County of Los Angeles Public Health Order mandates that hospitals enforce the policy through a form of identifier, and other hospitals are using similar identification methods, such as stickers and badges. In addition, this year's badges only have the date “2016-17” printed on them.

#### **I don't have patient contact. Why should I get vaccinated?**

Just one unvaccinated employee represents a risk to our patients' health and to the health of everyone else with whom they come into contact, particularly in such high traffic areas as elevators, restrooms, dining facilities, etc.

#### **Are other hospitals doing this?**

Yes, the County of Los Angeles Public Health Order affects **all** licensed acute care hospitals, skilled nursing facilities and intermediate care facilities in the county.

#### **If I am not vaccinated, where will I have to wear an isolation mask?**

The only people who will be permitted in patient care areas or the medical center wearing an isolation mask are those who have received a medical exemption. The policy also applies to outside vendors and contractors who visit patient-care areas. **Patient-care areas include the inpatient acute care areas, all procedural areas, and ambulatory patient care areas under the Cedars-Sinai license, as well as all Cedars-Sinai Medical Network patient-care areas.** This also includes the Davis Research Building and the research floors of the Advanced Health

Sciences Pavilion, as well as general public areas, such as lobbies/entrances, eating areas such as the cafeteria, and pedestrian walkways. If you have any questions about what is considered a patient-care area, please ask your manager or supervisor.

#### **What happens if I don't wear a badge or an isolation mask in patient-care areas?**

Managers/directors will be responsible for ensuring that their employees, including medical staff, house staff and volunteers, are in compliance in all patient-care areas. Healthcare workers in patient-care areas will be subject to corrective action and may be suspended without pay if they have not had a flu shot.

For medical staff and allied health professionals who are not employed by Cedars-Sinai, if a practitioner refuses to comply, Cedars-Sinai staff members have been instructed to report up their chain of command to the medical staff leadership, including the department chairs and elected leaders.

#### **How long do we have to wear the badges?**

The policy is in effect from Nov. 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017, unless the order is extended due to an unusually long flu season.

#### **If I wear an isolation mask because of a validated medical exemption, how often do I need to change it?**

Isolation masks may be worn continuously (and between patients) until they become moist or visibly soiled, at which point they should be replaced. However, masks should be replaced immediately after seeing a patient that is on droplet isolation.

#### **I already got my flu shot. How will I get one of the green badge buddies?**

You will have to provide proof of vaccination to Employee Health Services, unless you are a member of the medical staff (and not employed by Cedars-Sinai).

Members of the medical staff with clinical privileges and allied health professionals will receive an email with a link that directs them to a website to submit evidence that they received the vaccination (date of vaccination and place of administration) or attest that they declined the influenza vaccination. Badges can be picked up either in the Medical Staff office (Suite 2211 on the North Plaza level), from their department office or they will be mailed.

If a physician or allied health professional receives their flu shot at Cedars-Sinai, he/she will receive his/her badge buddy on the spot and his/her vaccination status will automatically be recorded (and they do not need to attest to their vaccination status online).

#### **What if I have a legitimate medical reason for refusing the flu vaccine?**

Exemptions may be given for medical reasons, per guidelines from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. To request a medical exemption, please have your medical provider complete the Physician's Verification of Request for Medical Exemption from Influenza Vaccination form that is available from Employee Health Services.

Once the form is completed and signed by your medical provider, please submit it to Employee Health Services. Your request will be reviewed by a physician panel, and you or your physician may be contacted for more information before the panel makes a determination as to whether you meet the criteria for exemption. Once the panel completes the review, you and your manager will be notified of the disposition by a member of the panel. A panel member will be available to discuss any questions or concerns.

#### **Please be aware that alternative vaccines are available for those with egg or latex allergies.**

#### **I declined the flu vaccination, but I've changed my mind. Can I still get vaccinated and receive the green badge even if I already submitted the declination form?**

Yes, you can get the flu vaccination at any time prior to the end of the flu season, even if you previously declined the flu vaccination. Once you receive the flu vaccination, you will be given the green badge indicating that you have been vaccinated.

#### **Do contractors and outside vendors also have to be vaccinated?**

Yes, the policy also applies to all vendors and contracted personnel. They must provide proof of vaccination and wear the badge buddies while they are in patient care areas in the acute care center and any Cedars-Sinai licensed area. If they wish to get their flu vaccination here, they will have to show their ID badge and pay a \$25 fee.

#### **Will the policy change during the flu season?**

The policy may change due to the unpredictability of the flu season. There may be a need to ramp up efforts to protect against influenza spread if we experience a severe epidemic. Measures such as the addition of locations where isolations masks are required or revised visitor policies may be considered.

#### **What should I do if I see an employee or physician with an orange badge who is not wearing an isolation mask?**

Politely remind the employee or physician to wear an isolation mask to comply with the County of Los Angeles

Public Health Order. For example, “I noticed you are not wearing an isolation mask, may I offer you one,” or “Isolation masks are available at the nurses’ station.” Staff members are also asked to report non-compliance up their chain of command.

### **I have an egg allergy. What are my options for flu vaccine?**

FluBlok® is a recombinant, inactivated, trivalent flu vaccine product that does not use any egg components in its production and can safely be used in adults aged 18 years and older with a severe egg allergy. Severe egg allergy is defined as reactions to egg involving angioedema (severe, rapid swelling), cardiovascular changes (such as decreased blood pressure), respiratory distress, lightheadedness, or recurrent vomiting, including those who required epinephrine or other emergency medical interventions. Those individuals who have experienced a mild reaction to eggs, defined as **mild** intolerance or hives only, may receive an inactivated trivalent flu vaccine like Fluvirin® or Afluria®. Individuals with a history of hives only after eating eggs should be observed for 30 minutes following vaccination with an inactivated trivalent flu vaccine.

### **Should I get the high-dose flu shot? Higher means better protection against the flu, right?**

Fluzone® High-Dose vaccine is currently the only high-dose influenza vaccine available and is designed for people 65 years of age and older. The Centers of Disease Control (CDC) has not stated a preference for high-dose influenza vaccine over standard-dose influenza vaccine products. If you are in this category, you can ask about this option.

Since aging decreases the body’s ability to produce a strong immune response, using a high-dose vaccine with additional antigen is thought to create a stronger immune response in the person receiving the vaccine. While it does appear that Fluzone® High-Dose creates a stronger immune response (i.e., higher antibody levels), a large, multicenter trial demonstrated only a modest improvement in efficacy of high-dose over standard-dose vaccine. Please discuss with your primary care physician as to whether you may benefit from the high-dose vaccine.

### **I have also heard about the quadrivalent vaccine... What is that and should I get it?**

Flu vaccines made to protect against three different strains of the flu virus (two influenza A and one

influenza B) are called **trivalent**, whereas those made to protect against four different strains (two influenza A and two influenza B) are called **quadrivalent** vaccines. No data is yet available to suggest significantly better flu protection with the inclusion of the additional influenza B virus antigen, and the CDC has no preferential recommendation for the quadrivalent influenza vaccine over the trivalent. A small amount of quadrivalent vaccine will be stocked for pediatric patients because neither Afluria® nor Fluvirin® are indicated for patients less than 4 years of age. All other flu vaccines stocked at Cedars-Sinai for the 2016-2017 season will be trivalent. Please discuss with your primary care physician as to whether you may benefit from the quadrivalent vaccine.

### **In the past, I have received FluMist®. Why is it not being offered this year?**

FluMist® is the quadrivalent, intranasal live vaccine used in previous flu seasons for patients who are between 2 and 49 years of age. Data from the 2015-2016 flu season estimated an effectiveness of this vaccine of only 3 percent, meaning that there was no measurable protective benefit from receiving the vaccine. This followed lower than expected effectiveness of FluMist® during the two previous flu seasons. Because of this, the committee that advises the CDC on vaccine recommendations (the ACIP) has recommended not to use FluMist® during the 2016-2017 flu season.

### **Should I get the flu vaccine if I’m pregnant or expect to be pregnant during flu season?**

Yes, the CDC strongly recommends flu vaccination for pregnant women to protect both themselves and their newborn infants (there is no vaccine available currently for infants under 6 months of age). Flu is more likely to cause severe illness in pregnant women than in women who are not pregnant. Flu shots are a safe way to protect the mother and her unborn child from serious illness and complications of flu. The flu shot has been given to millions of pregnant women over many years and has not been shown to cause harm. Link to CDC for more information: [http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/qa\\_vacpregnant.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/qa_vacpregnant.htm)

### **Which flu vaccine should I get if I’m pregnant?**

The CDC recommends that all pregnant women receive any one of the inactivated flu vaccines. Both inactivated, trivalent flu vaccines, Afluria® and Fluvirin®, are safe in pregnancy.

### **I would like preservative-free flu vaccine. Which one should I get?**

All flu vaccines offered at Cedars-Sinai are preservative-free.

