

September 1, 2009

My Fellow Loyolans,

At Loyola University Health System, we are proud of our strong patient-safety record, and we remain committed to ensuring that our patients receive care in the safest environment possible. We also want to maintain the safest work environment possible for Loyola employees.

I am sure you have read about the coming flu season and the concern experts have that this season may be a particularly difficult one with the presence of both seasonal flu and the novel H1N1 flu. Based on our commitment to patient and employee safety, we have implemented a new Influenza Immunization Policy that will require all LUMC, SSOM and Niehoff School of Nursing employees, volunteers and students to receive an annual vaccination for the seasonal flu. Gottlieb employees with direct patient contact also will be required to receive an annual flu vaccination.

For 25 years, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has strongly recommended that those employed in health-care facilities receive an annual flu vaccination. Each year, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized and more than 36,000 die from complications from the seasonal flu.

Last year, during our emergency flu vaccination drill, we reached a vaccination rate of 73 percent. This year, we plan to do even better to reduce the risk of influenza among our patients and coworkers. Flu vaccines will be distributed and available to clinical areas over the next two weeks for direct patient care givers. We are also planning a 36-hour, system-wide immunization drill for mid-October, which will make it easy for all employees to get the required shot. Details for the drill will be communicated and information will be provided via [loyola.wired](http://loyola.wired) on how you can receive your flu shot before, during or after the immunization drill.

By making the annual flu shot a condition of employment, just as we do with our TB testing, we will significantly reduce the transmission and incidence of influenza among our vulnerable patient population as well as our employees. We recognize that some employees may have concerns about getting this vaccine, so we have prepared this information packet, and we will have clinical experts available during the system-wide drill in October.

Please read the attached Q&A document included with this letter. This document and any new information also will be available on [loyola.wired](http://loyola.wired) throughout the flu season.

Patient safety is our number one goal. We have already demonstrated our leadership among Chicago's academic medical centers by being the first university health system to require mandatory MRSA screening. We expect that other major hospitals in the area will follow our lead in this initiative as well.

Having an annual flu shot is simply the right thing to do for our patients and visitors, for our families and for each other. I wish you good health as we enter this busy season.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Whelton", written over a horizontal line.

Paul K. Whelton, MB, MD, MSc  
President and CEO, Loyola University Health System

## **Q&A FOR EMPLOYEES LUHS' MANDATORY FLU VACCINATION POLICY**

### **What is our new policy?**

All LUMC, SSOM and Niehoff School of Nursing employees, volunteers and students will be required to receive an annual vaccination for the seasonal flu. Gottlieb employees with direct patient contact also must receive a flu vaccination. Any employee who does not get vaccinated by Dec. 1, 2009, will be unable to work in order to prevent the spread of seasonal influenza to Loyola patients, visitors, employees, and their families. Absences related to lack of compliance with the mandatory seasonal influenza immunization program will be treated as unexcused and unpaid absences.

### **When and where can I get the vaccine?**

LUHS will offer free vaccinations for LUMC, SSOM and Niehoff employees, volunteers and students. The Maywood campus will hold a vaccination drill on October 15 and 16. This will provide a convenient way for employees to receive the vaccine. However, some employees, especially those who work in areas of high patient contact, may prefer to be vaccinated earlier. Information about where to get your free vaccination will be available in the Important News section of [loyola.wired](http://loyola.wired) before, during, and after the drill. Gottlieb employees with direct patient contact also will be offered a free vaccination. A flyer with vaccination locations, dates and times will be distributed to each department at Gottlieb.

### **Do I have to get a flu shot at LUMC?**

No. You can receive your flu shot elsewhere. If you receive your flu shot outside of LUMC, you will be required to bring your supervisor valid documentation that you have received a flu shot. Remember, Loyola employees and students can receive their flu shot for free at Loyola.

### **Why are we doing this?**

Universal vaccination is necessary to protect the safety of both our patients and employees. Unvaccinated employees can catch and then spread flu to patients, other employees, as well as their families. In vulnerable patients, influenza can be fatal or result in long hospitalizations. The flu shot is safe and effective. It reduces infections and absenteeism among employees, prevents transmission to patients and reduces patient hospitalization, and mortality. It also protects employees' families by reducing the risks of catching the flu at work and then spreading it to family members at home. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and major medical organizations all strongly recommend that all health-care workers be vaccinated annually.

### **Why can't the vaccine be voluntary?**

Although our voluntary vaccination rate is higher than the national average for health-care workers, 27 percent of our employees still were not vaccinated last year. In the two prior years, 40 percent did not receive flu vaccination. This tells us that in a typical year, one in three Loyola health-care workers is not vaccinated – a rate that we believe falls short of our best practices and places our patients and employees at risk. We are committed to taking the right steps to minimize risk to our patients and our employees, and, therefore, will require the seasonal flu vaccine of all employees, volunteers and students beginning this year.

### **Doesn't a mandatory policy violate my rights?**

While Loyola respects the rights of its employees, we must remember that a health-care worker's first obligation is the safety of patients. Vaccination is a duty of care, and this duty must come before our workers' personal preferences.

### **Who is exempt?**

You may be granted an accommodation from the flu shot if:

-- You have a severe allergy to chicken eggs. This must be confirmed by a skin test. If you believe you have an egg allergy, you will be required to complete a skin test to verify the allergy.

-- Flu vaccination violates your religious beliefs. This must be confirmed by a letter from your church, synagogue, mosque, etc., on the religious organization's letterhead. A phone number must be included on the letter for confirmation purposes.

-- You have medical contraindications to the vaccine. This must be confirmed by a letter from your primary care physician or your OB/Gyn. The letter should contain the physician's contact information.

*-- Employees excused from receiving the vaccine will be required to wear a mask throughout the flu season at all times while on campus during working hours, except when eating. Additionally, they may not eat in the cafeteria; instead, they must eat in break rooms or at their desks (in non-clinical areas).*

### **I'm terrified of needles. Can I get a nasal spray vaccine (FluMist®) instead?**

No. Residual droplets from the vaccine can put patients at risk who have compromised immune systems. Many people find that flu shots are virtually painless. The needle is tiny compared with a needle used to, for example, draw blood. To minimize the pain further, let your arm hang limp. If your muscle is relaxed, the needle will go in easily.

**I'm pregnant. Do I still have to be vaccinated?**

Yes. The flu shot is safe for pregnant women. Flumist (the nasal spray) is *not* approved for use in pregnant women. A flu shot is especially important for this population because pregnancy can increase the risk for serious medical complications of flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended flu shots to pregnant women in all three trimesters of pregnancy since 2004.

**I once had a flu shot, but still got the flu. So why bother?**

Although the vaccine is not 100 percent effective, the CDC says it is the "most effective method for preventing influenza virus infection and its potentially severe complications."

**What is the safety record of the seasonal flu vaccination?**

The seasonal flu vaccination has been used safely for more than 60 years. Possible minor side effects can include soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site and low-grade fever and aches. These side effects usually resolve within 48 hours. On rare occasions, the seasonal flu vaccination can cause serious problems, such as a severe allergic reaction.

**So how effective is the vaccine?**

If there is a close match between the vaccine and circulating flu strains, the vaccine is 70 to 90 percent effective in preventing illness in healthy people under age 65.

**What are the side effects of the flu shot?**

The viruses in the flu are killed and inactivated, so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. Possible minor side effects include soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given, low-grade fever and aches. These are minor side effects and usually resolve within 48 hours.

**Does Loyola's supply of seasonal flu vaccines contain thimerosal?**

No. Loyola's seasonal flu vaccine supply is thimerosal free. Our supply is limited to 0.5 mL, preservative-free, single-dose, pre-filled syringes. Complete package inserts for our seasonal flu vaccine supply are available on [loyola.wired](http://loyola.wired).

**How long does it take for a flu shot to provide protection?**

Two weeks. That is why it is beneficial to receive the vaccination early in the flu season.

### **I never get the flu, so why should I get immunized?**

Influenza is highly contagious for up to 24 hours before you come down with all of the symptoms of the flu. Also, flu can live on contaminated surfaces such as doorknobs or elevator buttons. Furthermore, about half of all the people who have the flu don't have any of the classic flu symptoms and do not realize that they are spreading the flu to others. In one study of health-care workers, 23 percent had documented serologic evidence of having the flu during a mild flu season, but more than 50 percent did not recall having had the flu. The fact is, you can't rely on symptoms alone to determine whether you have the flu.

### **I do not have direct patient contact in my job. So why do I have to be vaccinated?**

Influenza is highly contagious. You may be walking down a hall, riding in an elevator, or standing in a line with other employees who do have direct patient contact. Or you may pass by family and friends coming to visit someone in the hospital. With one cough or sneeze, you could spread the flu to someone who does have direct patient contact.

### **Why can't we just make sure all patients are immunized?**

Loyola's average length of patient stay is about five days. Since it takes two weeks after a flu shot to develop protective antibodies, most of our patients would have already been discharged before a flu shot could protect them.

### **Will Loyola require mandatory vaccination for H1N1 ("swine") flu?**

No, not at this time. The timing of the supply of H1N1 vaccine is still not certain. In July, officials projected that 120 million doses would be ready by mid October, on August 21 the CDC changed that estimate. Now the CDC expects only 45-52 million doses are expected to be ready by mid October with 195 million doses expected by the end of the year. Also, studies are currently underway to determine whether people will need one or two. These studies won't yield results until mid September through mid October. We will provide updated information to all employees as soon as it is available.

### **How do employees order the flu vaccine?**

#### Ordering via Lawson

The influenza vaccines for outpatient clinics should be ordered via Lawson through a template in Lawson called "INFLUENZA VACCINE FOR EMPLOYEE". The product code is 815382 for an adult prefilled syringe. This selection is tied to the employee health account in Lawson so that the clinic account will not be charged for the expense.

#### Ordering via Pyxis

The influenza vaccines for Loyola inpatient units will be stored in the Pyxis refrigerators and their stock levels will be tracked in Pyxis. The vaccines will be removed via override on a patient called **\*Employee, Flu Vaccine**. The same stock will be used for both employees and patients, and will be restocked by pharmacy when the quantity reaches a

minimum level. It is VERY important that when removing a quantity to be used to vaccinate employees, the correct amount removed is entered into the Pyxis removal screen. This will ensure that the vaccine count is always accurate and restocked by pharmacy when appropriate.

Example: If you are vaccinating five employees, choose \*Employee, Flu Vaccine from the top of the patient list, select "Remove", choose "Override Meds", select "influenza virus vaccine" from the med list, enter "5" for your quantity, skip the override reasons, and close the refrigerator door.

#### Ordering for a clinical versus non-clinical site

Vaccine orders placed for clinical sites will receive just the vaccine and VIS and consent forms since those sites will have readily available any other medical supplies needed.

However, if placing an order for a non-clinical site, please contact the pharmacy to ensure they know that your order requires entire flu packets (gloves, alcohol swabs bandaids, sharps container, 2X2 gauze pads and needles, if the doses do not come with a needle) for the number of employees you intend to vaccinate.

#### **How do we handle VIS and consent forms?**

Outpatient clinics that place their vaccine orders through Lawson will receive the appropriate number of VIS and consent forms with their employee vaccine order.

Inpatient units that order through Pyxis, are responsible for going to the Pharmacy between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. and picking up the number of VIS and consent forms they will need for all of their employees for all shifts.

To ensure the consent forms are not misused, please ensure you only give the forms to those nurses that you have assigned to administer employee flu shots. It will be their responsibility to protect the forms and ensure they are only completed for employees who have received a flu shot.

Please note that #three on the consent form, being allergic to thimerosal, is not a valid reason not to receive the flu vaccine since all of our products are thimerosal free (the same will not apply to the H1N1 vaccine since it will contain thimerosal.)

#### **What is the responsibility of the nurse who administers the vaccines?**

The nurse administering the vaccine should give the employee a copy of the 2009-2010 Influenza Vaccine Information Statement and address any questions or concerns the employee may have. Next, the employee should be asked to complete the top portion of the consent form and sign it. After administering the vaccine and completing the remainder of the form, the nurse should give the employee the two bottom copies of the triplicate form and send the top copy to medical records for scanning into the employee's medical record.

**What are the responsibilities of the managers involved with the mandatory flu vaccination?**

Managers are responsible for entering influenza vaccine compliance information for the employees that report to them into the Occupational Health compliance application available via the portal. Managers also will be responsible for tracking department compliance via reporting available through Lawson. Department administrators also will be responsible for tracking compliance for their faculty.

Please note that details regarding the tracking of student, resident, volunteer and contracted employees are still being worked out and will be communicated shortly.

After your employee or faculty member gives you your copy of the consent form or a copy of a letter from his or her physician or religious leader, which clearly and explicitly excuses them from the flu shot requirement, you will need to go into the portal to document the action taken by the employee or faculty member. If there is any concern about the validity of documentation indicating an employee should be excused from the requirement, Paula Hindle should be contacted.

If one of your employees is excused from the flu shot requirement, it will be your responsibility to ensure the employee wears a mask at all times throughout the flu season while on campus during working hours, except when eating. Please note that employees required to wear masks may not eat in the cafeteria; instead, they must eat in break rooms or at their desks (in non-clinical areas).

If you are a manager of a non-clinical area, please contact one of your department nurses and work with them to arrange for administration of flu vaccines for you and your staff. If you do not have any nursing staff in your area, please contact Paula Hindle, and she will arrange for a nurse to contact you to make arrangements.

**How will Loyola ensure that employees are compliant with the mandatory flu vaccination?**

Compliance data will be downloaded into Lawson on an ongoing basis and will be viewable to all managers via their Lawson Reports. Once a download schedule is determined, all managers will be informed.