

# INCREASING UNDERSTANDING OF ENHANCED INFLUENZA VACCINE PRODUCTS IN LONG-TERM CARE SETTINGS

## Practical Strategies for Increasing Use of Enhanced Influenza Vaccine Products Among LTCF Residents and Staff

### Key Points

Practice standards and clinical recommendations are available to guide best practices for adult vaccinations, including influenza vaccines.

Facilities can use practical strategies for improving immunization rates among nursing home staff and residents, including having leaders commit to vaccine education, implementing universal vaccination policies, making vaccines easily accessible, and documenting vaccination efforts.



Families admitting their loved ones to long-term care facilities (LTCFs) need to know that infection prevention and control are priorities. For post-acute care patients on their way to LTCF beds, respiratory viruses are a key concern. To attract qualified staff who are concerned with their own health, LTCF managers need to be able to demonstrate effectiveness of vaccination policies and infection control practices.

These goals can be reached by educating staff about vaccines and vaccinations, strongly recommending or requiring vaccinations, administering vaccines or working to make these easy for staff and residents to get, and documenting vaccinations as responsible members of the immunization community.<sup>1,2</sup>

### 1

## Having Leaders Commit to Education at All Levels

The first step in strengthening vaccine policies in LTCFs is through staff education. This begins with making sure facility managers and clinical leaders are all on board with vaccination policies and procedures. A variety of practical, clinical, and financial challenges can come up in this process. Information is available to counter concerns about reimbursement issues, the true cost to facilities when residents are ill or must be transferred for acute care, and the expense of bringing in replacement workers if staff become sick and cannot work. For vaccine policies to be effective, commitment of LTCF leaders is necessary.<sup>3</sup>

As education moves to the staff level, everyone employed by LTCFs should learn about practice standards for all health professionals as developed by the National Vaccine Advisory Committee and recommendations for adult vaccinations developed by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, a component of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.<sup>1,2</sup>

By learning about these standards and their importance to resident health, facility staff develop greater awareness of their personal responsibility to be fully vaccinated. The advantages of using enhanced influenza vaccines in older adults can be emphasized during staff education sessions. Nursing staff, other clinical workers, social workers, and consultant pharmacists must all be conversant about the value and effectiveness of vaccines for these efforts to produce the highest possible vaccination rates. Nonmedical staff — including employees in housekeeping, dietary services, and maintenance — should also be educated about the importance of immunizations and encouraged or required to stay current with vaccines that can help protect residents.<sup>3</sup>

## 2

## Implementing Universal LTCF Vaccination Policies

LTCF administrators and clinical leaders can adopt established best practices to increase both staff vaccinations and resident vaccinations, as identified in a 2016 stakeholder summit convened by The Gerontological Society of America<sup>3</sup>:

- Emphasize mandatory vaccination policies during the hiring process and vaccinate new employees within 48 hours.
- Obtain renewable informed consent from employees, contractors, and health professions students and residents in the facility.
- Obtain a general consent for vaccinations and include vaccines in standing orders.
- Use gamification, etc... quizzes, and puzzles to increase awareness of influenza and its impact on health.

## 3

## Making Vaccines Accessible and Easy to Get


Cost and convenience are key factors in raising vaccination rates in all settings, including LTCFs. Facilities should identify ways of offering vaccinations with no or minimal out-of-pocket costs to staff and residents. This can be accomplished by training staff to administer and bill Medicare/Medicaid for residents and employee insurance for staff vaccinations. If staffing for vaccinations is not feasible, facilities can turn to partners in the aging and pharmacy communities. These entities specialize in setting up vaccination clinics within the facility and billing for services separately.

If staff cannot be vaccinated within the facility, paid time off should be arranged so they can receive the influenza vaccine elsewhere. When needed, incentives for getting immunized can be offered, such as an additional paid day off. Another strategy of minimizing communicable diseases in LTCFs is to provide paid time off for illnesses so that staff do not come to work when sick.

## 4

## Documenting Vaccination Efforts

Even before COVID-19, consumer surveys showed that people expect LTCFs to have high or universal influenza vaccination rates. People 50 to 80 years of age told surveyors they expected staff and residents in LTCFs to be vaccinated, and 70% of respondents would be less likely to choose an LTCF if they knew that one-third of staff members were not vaccinated.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in addition to fulfilling professional responsibilities to document vaccinations in medical records and state immunization information systems, LTCFs should trumpet their vaccination efforts to the community and potential residents.

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### Resources

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3. Gerontological Society of America. Charting a Path to Increase Immunization Rates in the Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Settings. 2018. Available at: [https://www.geron.org/images/navp/pdfs/ImmunizRatesWP\\_FNL.pdf](https://www.geron.org/images/navp/pdfs/ImmunizRatesWP_FNL.pdf). Accessed May 18, 2020.
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