

Letter to the Editor: Requiring Flu Vaccination

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Health Systems Unite to Combat Flu

This fall, hospitals and health systems in Indianapolis are engaging in a united fight to protect and improve the health and safety of all patients. Community Health Network, Indiana University Health, Franciscan St. Francis, and Wishard Health Services are implementing a requirement for all employees and physicians to get a flu vaccination, a step that will help ensure patients aren't needlessly exposed to influenza.

Health worker vaccination rates are directly linked to patient safety, including increased influenza-like illnesses, medical visits and even increase mortality among extended care facility residents and hospitals.

Together with the Indianapolis Coalition for Patient Safety, the participating hospitals and Indianapolis EMS developed a common policy requiring flu vaccinations. Their goal is to have greater than 95 percent vaccination rates, accounting for exemptions among staff unable to accept the vaccine following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention standards, by Feb. 1, 2013. Alternative requirements, including wearing masks, restricting patient contact, and others are being established for individuals unable to accept the vaccine.

While a large percentage of hospitals and health systems in America rely on voluntary vaccinations, the difference between vaccination rates in voluntary and required programs is between 40 and 50 percent. More importantly, it may be the difference between good and bad health outcomes for patients.

And that's what patient safety is all about – doing what's best to improve outcomes for patients. It's at the heart of the health care industry and at the heart of the requiring flu vaccine policy these health systems have adopted.

Charles Miramonti, MD
Chairman
Indianapolis Coalition for Patient Safety