



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 10, 2014

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Health Department. Urges Health Care Workers to Get Vaccinated Against the Flu

PITTSBURGH – The Allegheny County Health Department is urging all health care workers in Allegheny County to get vaccinated against influenza. Vaccination against the flu will help to protect not only health care workers but also their patients. Health care workers include staff involved in patient care as well as other personnel who work in patient areas and can play a role in the transmission of flu.

“Boosting vaccination rates among health care workers can help reduce the transmission of influenza, curb staff illness and absenteeism, and ultimately decrease influenza-related illness and death. Vaccination is especially important in reducing influenza among the elderly and the chronically ill who are at increased risk for severe complications from the flu,” said Health Director Dr. Karen Hacker.

“We strongly encourage health care workers who have been vaccinated against the flu to let their patients know, because it sets such a positive example for everyone else to follow,” added Dr. Hacker.

“Our goal is community immunity and that includes not just the general public but health care workers too. When they’re vaccinated, it protects them, their families and the community they serve. That’s why we support the efforts of acute care facilities to increase vaccination rates among their health care workers,” said Cindy Callaghan, Chairperson of the Allegheny County Immunization Coalition.

In a national survey, 75% of health care workers reported being vaccinated against influenza last season, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reported coverage was higher among health care workers in hospitals (90%) than among workers in long-term care facilities (63%) and higher among physicians (92%) and nurses (91%) than among assistants/aides (58%) and nonclinical personnel (67%) who participated in the survey.

Flu vaccination rates were lower among employees in health care facilities in Allegheny County, with median coverage of 67% at hospitals (2012 data) and median coverage of 55% at long-term care facilities (2013 data). Of the 64 licensed long-term care facilities in Allegheny County, 26 had flu vaccination coverage of less than 50% among employees.

National surveys indicate that vaccination coverage in health care personnel is much higher if vaccination is mandatory or if vaccination is actively promoted and offered free on-site on multiple days.

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