## District Council 37 Safety & Health ALERT

New NYS requirement for flu vaccination

Starting this year, the NYS Department of Health (NYSDOH) will require workers in healthcare facilities to either get a flu vaccine or wear a surgical or procedure mask during flu season in patient and resident areas.



#### When is flu season?

Flu season is determined each year by the NYS Commissioner of Health. Flu season varies year to year, but typically covers the late fall through early spring.

#### What facilities are covered under this regulation?

Hospitals, nursing homes, diagnostic and treatment centers, hospice facilities and home care programs must comply with the new regulation.

#### Who is covered?

Everyone (both paid and unpaid) who works in hospitals, nursing homes, diagnostic and treatment centers, hospice facilities and home care is covered by the regulation. This includes employees, members of the medical and nursing staff, temporary agency staff, contract staff, students and volunteers, "who engage in activities such that if they were infected with the flu, they could potentially expose patients or residents to the disease."

## Who is required to wear a mask?

All personnel not vaccinated against the flu for the current flu season when they are in areas where patients or residents may be present must wear a surgical or procedure mask. Masks should be made available at all covered facilities.

#### What if I can't get vaccinated for medical reasons?

All unvaccinated workers must wear a surgical or procedure mask when in designated areas. There are <u>no</u> exemptions.

#### What is the proper way to use a surgical or procedure mask?

- Mask should be changed when they become moist.
- Masks should be changed between patients.
- A used mask should never be re-used.
- Masks should not be left dangling around the neck.
- Remove the mask by its straps or elastic band to limit contact with any contaminated areas on the mask.
- After touching or discarding a used mask, wash hands or use a hand sanitizer.

### Where are unvaccinated employees required to wear masks?

According to the NYSDOH, designated or "identified" areas include any area where a healthcare worker could expose patients to the flu. Identified areas where unvaccinated workers will be required to wear masks are determined by senior staff at each facility. According to the NYSDOH, designated areas include, but are not limited to:

- patient rooms
- nurses' stations
- hallways and elevators where patients might be present
- cafeterias if patients may be present (except when the unvaccinated healthcare worker is eating)
- patients' homes when providing home care

#### Can I get vaccinated by my own doctor?

Flu vaccines will be provided free of charge by facilities covered under this regulation. However, you can choose to get vaccinated elsewhere if you prefer. You will have to provide proof of vaccination. Documentation must include a signed immunization card or statement from the vaccine provider with the vaccination date and the provider's name and address.

# How will my employer/supervisor know if I've been vaccinated?

Employers will provide employees with a form of identification regarding the employee's vaccination status (vaccinated or unvaccinated) which employees will have to display when in identified areas.

#### Is the flu vaccine safe?

Vaccines, including flu vaccines, are generally safe with little or no side effects. Most people do not experience any side effects from the flu vaccine other than some soreness at the injection site. It is NOT TRUE that you can get the flu from a flu vaccine. Although flu vaccines vary in effectiveness from year to year, they do help limit the spread of the flu and, in many cases, make you less ill if you do get the flu.



For more information, please contact your union representative or the District Council 37 Safety and Health Department at 212-815-1685.

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