



# Influenza

www.workwell.health.nz

## Influenza Facts

- Influenza can be easily spread any where and at any time. Anyone can catch it, including your family, whānau and friends.
- Influenza is not just a 'bad cold'. Influenza is usually much more severe and can even cause death.
- More than a million Kiwis get the annual influenza immunisation each year.
- You can not get influenza from the vaccine.
- Influenza immunisation is FREE for those most at risk (those aged 65 and over, pregnant women, and children and adults with a chronic medical condition).



## Why should workplaces care about the flu vaccination?

Immunisation can prevent a wide range of serious infectious diseases and is one of the most cost-effective means of preventing disease and improving health<sup>1</sup>.

The Wellness in the Workplace Survey Report, (2015) suggests that the provision of flu vaccinations are a relatively inexpensive way of preventing significant time out of the workforce. Healthy, immunised working adults experience significantly fewer days off work and visits to the doctor than unvaccinated working adults. Providing free or subsidised flu vaccinations are a relatively inexpensive way of enhancing your workplace wellbeing and can reduce absenteeism. In 2014, the average total cost for an absent employee was \$616, and the direct costs of absence for New Zealand as a whole alone amounted to 1.45 billion dollars. It is important for workplaces to promote good infection control strategies to help prevent the spread and impact of illness amongst their workforce, as well as other visitors to the workplace e.g. contractors and family members.

## Frequently heard myths<sup>2</sup>

**“The flu jab can give you the flu”** - You cannot get influenza from the vaccine, as it does not contain any live viruses. However, some people may experience mild side effects such as short term muscle aches or headaches, this generally goes away after a couple of days.

**“I don't think it works”** - Influenza vaccination is about 73% effective in preventing infection with influenza A and B viruses in healthy adults under 65 years of age. Healthy, immunised working adults experience significantly fewer days off work and have fewer doctor visits. Specifically, employees that have been vaccinated have had up to 44 percent fewer doctor visits and up to 45 percent fewer lost workdays<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.immune.org.nz/frequently-asked-questions>

<sup>2</sup> [www.immune.org.nz/sites/default/files/resources/FluMythsFINAL310315.pdf](http://www.immune.org.nz/sites/default/files/resources/FluMythsFINAL310315.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.businessgrouphealth.org/pub/f3137df6-2354-d714-5143-de37eb0ecd7c>



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**“I’m fit, I wont get the flu”** - Influenza can affect anyone, no matter how fit, active and healthy they may be.

**“I got the flu vaccine last time, I don’t need to get it again”** - Yes you do, for two reasons: Your immunity decreases over time, and each year influenza can be caused by different strains of influenza viruses that are not represented in the previous year’s vaccine.

## **WorkWell Multi-Level Approach**

*Consider your workplace’s approach to fighting flu across three levels:*

### **Organisational** (Policies and procedures)

- Develop an immunisation policy, or include an immunisation policy in a standard employee wellbeing policy.
- Provide free or subsidised flu vaccinations to your staff through a workplace vaccinator or your local GP.
- Offer staff incentives for getting their flu shot, such as providing it to them for free, offering refreshments, or hosting a contest for the department that has the highest number of employees who get vaccinated.
- Encourage managers to lead by example and be amongst the first to get vaccinated.
- Encourage unwell staff members to stay away from the workplace until they are no longer infectious.

### **Environmental** (Infrastructure and facilities)

- Appoint an effective Immunisation Champion to organise your vaccination programme and provide encouragement through multiple channels such as, emails, posters, flyers and information at staff meetings.
- Provide facilities for hand hygiene (soap and hand washing facilities, alcohol hand gels and hand towels) and encouraging staff to practice good personal hygiene.
- Practice environmental infection control such as, ensure work surfaces, communal bathrooms and eating areas are regularly cleaned.

### **Individual** (Opportunities, information and training)

- Provide information on the benefits of flu vaccination
- Provide early communication leading up to flu vaccination dates.
- Ensure staff are aware of basic hygiene practices.

For tips on promoting infection control and immunisation in your workplace, go to:  
[www.workwell.health.nz/workwell\\_infection\\_control\\_and\\_immunisation](http://www.workwell.health.nz/workwell_infection_control_and_immunisation) and [www.fightflu.co.nz](http://www.fightflu.co.nz)