

Fact sheet for health care workers: **Protect yourself and your patients from influenza**



If you are a health care worker you are at greater risk of being exposed to influenza than the general population.

A systematic review compared the incidence of influenza in healthy adults and health care workers. Among health care workers the incidence was significantly higher. Another review showed that, during outbreaks in health care facilities, 10–59% of health care workers caring for influenza patients became infected with the virus. Those working in emergency departments and clinical settings are most at risk and, of all health care workers, nurses are most exposed to the virus.

Once you have influenza you can pass it on to your patients.

Studies show that health care workers can transmit influenza to patients, who may be especially vulnerable to complications. In fact this has been cited as a principal source of infection for patients in the health care setting. Flu is particularly undesirable for infants, the elderly and those with immunosuppressive and other chronic conditions. Some patients may develop life-threatening complications and there have been documented cases of influenza deaths in neonatal intensive care units and paediatric oncology wards following health care worker transmission.

Because health care workers are dedicated individuals, they often come to work when they are sick, increasing the risk of transmission.

A survey conducted in California, United States of America, showed that 1 in 3 health care workers developed influenza during the flu season and that 3 in 4 of them cared for patients while sick. A study in Glasgow, United Kingdom, showed that half of the health care workers who had flu did not realize that they had the virus. Being vaccinated can give you peace of mind as you are less likely to infect vulnerable patients.

When health care workers are off work sick, patient care can suffer.

Staff shortages can have a negative effect on patient care. Lack of nurses in intensive care units can increase mortality. Yet despite this, vaccination rates among health care workers remain low.

WHO recommends that all health care workers are vaccinated against seasonal influenza every autumn.