



The Importance of Immunization

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Since the creation of the smallpox vaccine over two hundred years ago, immunization from viruses has been one of the most cost-effective strategies to protect the public from illness. From polio to tuberculosis, many of the world's once-feared diseases have been eradicated or substantially weakened due to the ability of a vaccine to work with the human body to develop immunity before it is exposed to a virulent virus. It is a proactive approach to medicine that is very successful.

Historically, many employers have offered vaccination as a covered health benefit due to the perceived importance of immunization for their employees and their families. By keeping employees immunized, absenteeism is decreased while other direct and indirect healthcare costs are reduced as well. One way to increase employee vaccination rates is to provide an onsite vaccine clinic, which was shown by a 2012 employer-sponsored program.


We all know that not everyone wants to get vaccinated for a multitude of reasons. The purpose of this article is to address some of these misconceptions and provide an update on 3 viral infections (influenza, shingles, and pneumonia) that have safe and effective vaccines to prevent them.

Influenza

Flu shot season is upon us, and more people than ever can be vaccinated for optimal influenza protection thanks to some new vaccine dosage forms. The majority of flu vaccines protect against the three strains of flu projected to impact North America the hardest. Flu shots this year are recommended for everyone 6 months & older and contain one new influenza A strain, H1N1 influenza A, and one influenza B strain. Some vaccine manufacturers have added another influenza B strain to broaden protection, but the CDC does not recommend quadrivalent over the trivalent vaccine at this time.

Another flu vaccine innovation comes in the form of Flublok®, which will allow people with an egg allergy to finally rest easy during flu season because it is manufactured without the use of chicken eggs. For those people aged 2 through 49 that are afraid of really thin needles, a nasal spray (FluMist®) has been developed that contains a weakened live form of the virus, which makes it the only flu vaccine that has the potential to give someone flu-like symptoms in rare cases. In case it was not clear from the last sentence, you cannot get the flu from getting a flu shot. It is important to understand that it takes two weeks for the flu shot to provide influenza immunity. If you believe you (or someone you know) got the flu from the flu shot, an exposure to a live influenza virus occurred around the day of vaccination. Chalk that up to bad timing.

Speaking of timing, did you know that flu season peaks between January-March? It is best to receive the flu shot when influenza begins to spread in September and October in order to have protection from



the full flu season, but it is still recommended to get vaccinated at any time before Spring rolls around on the calendar.

For those still not convinced to get the flu shot for your own protection, try considering the people around you that could get the harmful influenza virus from your unvaccinated self if you unknowingly become a carrier of the disease. By becoming vaccinated from the flu, you protect yourself and the public.

Shingles

Almost one out of every three people in the United States will develop shingles, also known as herpes zoster, which relates to the fact that 99% of Americans born before 1995 are appropriate candidates for the shingles vaccine (Zostavax®) due to previous chicken pox exposure. The CDC recommends Zostavax® for shingles prevention in people 60 years old and older. However, the vaccine recently became approved for people as young as 50. The good news is no maximum age exists for receiving the shingles vaccine.

The biggest misconception in regards to shingles is that vaccination is not necessary once you have had a shingles outbreak. This is simply not true. Future occurrences can be prevented by the vaccine even if you have had shingles before. No precise waiting time before receiving the shingles vaccine post-shingles outbreak. Generally, a person should make sure that the shingles rash has disappeared before getting vaccinated.

Pneumonia

Often known as a secondary illness because it impacts people with weakened immune systems, pneumonia (or pneumococcal disease) is a leading cause of vaccine-preventable illness and death in the United States. Everyone over the age of 65 should be vaccinated from pneumonia, but a bigger push to get those high risk individuals aged 19-64 vaccinated needs to be made since only 18.5% of this population was immunized. What working-class groups are at a high risk for pneumonia? That would be people with certain health problems (diabetics are 3 times more likely to die from pneumonia), immunocompromised patients, smokers, and adults with asthma. Very young children are at risk as well, so do your part to educate others on the importance of pneumonia vaccination.

In summary, immunizations are an affordable and effective way to prevent many harmful viruses. They can easily be provided at a physician's office, local pharmacy, or through an employer-sponsored onsite clinic. Do your part to protect yourself and the public: get vaccinated.

Workforce Engagement

...continued from page 3

worker productivity. Their Workplace Health Promotion Model (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011) provides workplace governance and planning considerations which are integral to building the desired environment to support health management initiatives.

So how can you tell if your company's culture supports health management initiatives? WELCOA has designed both free and member-only tools to include a Quick-Inventory as well as a short Culture Audit Questionnaire, both of which can be found by visiting their site at www.welcoa.org. Another excellent resource for employers is the Partnership for Prevention at www.prevent.org. The 2011 Leading by Example, which is a peer-to-peer communication campaign that educates CEOs about the benefits of worksite health promotion and encourages employers to adopt effective practices to improve employee health, highlights the need for employers to integrate health into the core of their business, aligning workplace policies and procedures with the vision of each organization. In the 2005 edition, found at <http://www.prevent.org/data/files/initiatives/leadingbyexample2005report.pdf>, a Health Management Initiative Assessment can be found on page 3. Comparing to the successes of others is a great way to gauge where your own company culture is in terms of supporting behavior change and promoting good health.

Works Cited

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