

TO: All Employees, Physicians and Volunteers

FROM: James Sanger
President and CEO

DATE: September 4, 2009

RE: Influenza preparedness and vaccination plan

SSM Health Care – St. Louis is committed to the safety of our employees and patients. **We want to protect you, your families and all our patients for whom we provide care.** As a result, we want to share some important information with you regarding influenza and what we are doing to keep you safe and healthy.

We recently activated a multidisciplinary influenza taskforce to review all issues related to the upcoming influenza (flu) season. Sub teams representing multiple departments and entities are working proactively to coordinate our response to influenza.

It is predicted to be a severe influenza season this year given the emergence of the new H1N1 (swine) influenza. We are providing seasonal flu vaccine beginning **September 8** at flu clinics offered across the network. In addition to the seasonal flu vaccine, we will offer the H1N1 vaccine when it is available later this fall based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations.

Seasonal Influenza Vaccination

Vaccination is one way you can protect yourself, family members, patients and co-workers. A new system-wide policy was implemented on September 1 to reduce the risk of exposure and transmission of the seasonal flu. The goal is to educate employees on the value of the vaccine and increase immunizations among employees. The policy requires every SSM Health Care employee, employed physician, volunteer and contract/temporary employee to receive educational material regarding the seasonal flu vaccine and require them to choose to either:

- 1) Receive the seasonal flu vaccine.
- 2) Or sign a document declining the vaccine and indicate the reason.

The Influenza Education and Vaccination Policy – Mandatory Participation Program is accessible through the SSM Health Care intranet at <http://stlapps.ssmhc.com/intranet/home/ssmhealthstl.nsf>. The Influenza Vaccination Participation Forms must be completed by December 1.

SSM Health Care – St. Louis vaccination clinics will begin the week of September 7. Attached are the dates and locations of clinics for the month of September. Additional times will be scheduled for October and employee health will be doing department rounds to provide the vaccine. Plans are being finalized to provide flu clinics for the SSM Physician Organization.

Information about Seasonal Influenza and H1N1 (Swine) Influenza

We believe many people will potentially be infected by the seasonal and/or H1N1 influenza viruses. The H1N1 influenza virus is affecting a younger and healthy population. In addition, pregnant women are considered a high-risk group and are likely to be one of the first groups to receive the H1N1 vaccination.

At the current time, the CDC believes that H1N1 (swine) flu has similar symptoms and is spread like seasonal flu viruses. Flu viruses spread mainly person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouths, nose, or eyes. With seasonal flu, studies have shown that people may be contagious from one day before they develop symptoms up to seven days after they become ill. Children, especially younger children, potentially can be contagious for longer periods.

Many people with H1N1 influenza had relatively mild symptoms lasting several days and have recovered without the need for antiviral treatment, such as Tamiflu. For most individuals presenting with typical symptoms of influenza, a diagnosis can be made without laboratory testing.

Symptoms of Influenza

Employees need to recognize the symptoms and know what to do to protect patients and co-workers. Caregivers in direct patient contact are reminded to protect themselves by performing hand hygiene often and wearing the proper personal protective equipment, such as, mask, gloves and eye protection.

Nearly all persons with this flu strain will have at least two of these symptoms. If you are sick, you may be ill for a week or longer. Common symptoms include;

- Fever over 100 degrees
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Runny nose
- Body aches
- Tiredness
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting

If You Become Ill While at Work

If you become ill while at work with fever or flu-like symptoms please notify your supervisor and Employee Health/Infection Prevention offices. Ill workers found to be exhibiting any flu-like symptoms will be sent home from work.

We appreciate your cooperation in attending the vaccination clinics by December 1. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your employee health nurse. Flu information is updated daily by the CDC at www.cdc.gov. SSM Health Care posts regular updates and resources on the **SSM Health Care – St. Louis intranet Flu Forum**.