

PARTICIPATOR

December 2007

What Are You Going To Do With The Flu?

Are you hearing coughing in the cubicles or sneezing and sniffing elsewhere? Are you worried about a crippling number of employees calling in sick? Or worse, do you suspect flu-stricken employees are showing up, spreading germs, and turning in subpar work? Face it: It's flu season.

What's a workplace to do?

First, get the word out about how employees can lessen the flu's impact. The Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a number of resources targeted to the workplace (go to www.cdc.gov/flu/workplace/index.htm). You will find downloadable posters and brochures on how germs spread, how hand washing helps, the influenza vaccine, and other ways to keep from getting sick.

Many workplaces find it cost-effective to offer free or low-cost vaccinations at work. That option may be more feasible this year than in years past because the federal government reports plentiful supplies of vaccine this year, unlike in previous years when short supplies caused only the most at risk in the population to get the shot.

How to time and target vaccination

Afraid that if you haven't already made plans to inoculate people at work it will be too late before you can get arrangements made? Better late than never, according to the CDC, and the dead of winter is definitely not too late. Most flu cases show up in January or later. It varies, of course, but flu season can last as late as May.

If you do schedule a flu shot clinic, you may find many employees reluctant to get the vaccination because of persistent misconceptions that the shot can actually bring on a case of the flu. The CDC, however, says that's not true since the viruses used to make the vaccine are killed.

You may also have employees who are afraid that the shot can cause problems even worse than the flu. But the CDC says serious problems are rare, although soreness and redness at the shot site are more common. A few people shouldn't get the shot, however. The CDC advises those with a severe allergy to eggs or a previous flu shot and those with a history of Guillain-Barre syndrome to skip the shot.



Some employees believe vaccination won't do any good since the vaccines are made before the flu strikes and vaccine developers are only guessing which strains to target. It's true that shots can sometimes miss the mark, but getting the vaccine is your best protection, according to the CDC. Studies show that the effectiveness of the flu shot ranges from 70 to 90 percent when there's a good match, and vaccines include protection against multiple strains of influenza.

Beyond prevention

No matter how diligent you are at protecting your workplace, some people are likely to get sick, and that means dealing with absenteeism. That's a problem, of course, but covering for absent workers is better than having sick people show up. A sick employee is an unproductive and contagious employee, and supervisors should be encouraged to take steps to discourage "presenteeism" – having workers who should be home coming to work instead.

Why do people come to work when they're miserably sick? A poll conducted in February by LifeCare, a company that works with employers on health care solutions, asked workers why they

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go to work sick. Thirty-one percent said it's too risky to take time off because of office politics and workplace culture, and another 23 percent said they were just too busy at work to stay home. ■

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NDIRF BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTION

Annually, at least two seats on the nine-member NDIRF Board of Directors are up for election. The election is held by member voting through solicitation of proxies by mail or voting in person at the NDIRF Annual Meeting.

In 2008, directorships representing the member categories of "Schools" and "Others" are up for election. The incumbent board members are Burdell Johnson, a Tuttle School Board member and current NDSBA President ("Schools") and Rod Landblom, Executive Director of the Roosevelt-Custer Regional Council ("Others").

Elected officers or employees of NDIRF members, from among the respective categories electing a director in a given year (for example, "Schools" and "Others" in 2008), are eligible to serve as directors.

Any eligible person wishing to be considered by the NDIRF Nominating Committee as a director candidate must complete and submit a Candidate Application Form by January 31, 2008. To obtain a copy of the form, please contact the NDIRF office by phone at 1-800-421-1988; by mail at P.O. Box 2258, Bismarck, ND 58502; or via e-mail at steve.spilde@ndirf.com; and directing your request to the attention of the CEO. ■



The NDIRF office will be closed on Monday and Tuesday, December 24 & 25, 2007 and Tuesday, January 1, 2008

North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund Board of Directors

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