

Nursing practice and work environment

Immunizations: What nurses should know for influenza season

By Ruth Francis, MPH, MCHES

AS INFLUENZA SEASON APPROACHES, registered nurses (RNs) can prepare by knowing the latest information about adult immunizations and influenza.

Adult immunizations

Each year, tens of thousands of adults suffer needlessly, are hospitalized, and even die from vaccine-preventable diseases, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Results from a 2012 study by the National Health Interview Survey indicated that the immunization rates of adults ages 19 and older were extremely low, even though most insurance plans covered the cost of recommended vaccines. To increase the rates of adult immunizations, the National Vaccine Advisory Committee, supported by the CDC, has published standards for adult immunization practice. The document emphasizes the role all healthcare professionals play in ensuring that adult patients are fully immunized. For the most up-to-date schedule and details of administration, go to www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules. (See *Summary of CDC's 2013 standards for adult immunization practice*.)

RNs must provide accurate health information to their patients. According to the CDC, a recommendation from their provider is the top predictor of patients getting vaccinated. ANA offers educational resources for RNs and released a new position statement in August. The position statement recommends that nurses are fully immunized to protect themselves, their patients, and the public from vaccine-preventable diseases. The statement is consistent with federal recommendations and those of other health-related associations. To read the new position statement, go to www.anaimmunize.org.

Influenza

The influenza season of 2014-2015 was unusually long, lasting to the end of May. It was severe for those ages 65 and older. The vaccine for that season offered reduced protection, especially for influenza A (H₃N₂), which drifted, making the vaccine strains less effective than anticipated.

The World Health Organization and Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices have approved the influenza vaccines for the 2015-2016 influenza season, and adjustments have been made to avoid a repeat of last season.

Summary of CDC's 2013 standards for adult immunization practice

1. ASSESS immunization status of all patients at every clinical encounter.
2. Strongly RECOMMEND vaccines that patients need.
3. ADMINISTER needed vaccines or REFER to a provider who can immunize.
4. DOCUMENT vaccines received by your patients. (See <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/patient-ed/adults/for-practice/standards/assessment.html>.)

The best precaution against influenza is to get vaccinated. This ensures protection for yourself and those around you. As added protection, see the precautions below.

Everyday precautions during influenza season

The CDC provides the following guidelines:

1. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too.
2. If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
3. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
4. Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
5. Germs often are spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
6. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work, or school, especially when someone is ill. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. ★

Source: Preventing the Flu: Good Health Habits Can Help Stop Germs. www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm

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Selected references

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