2016 Mandatory Influenza Vaccination Program Frequently Asked Questions

Novant Health continues to be a leader in healthcare by requiring an annual influenza vaccination for all team members, physicians, volunteers, contract staff, students and others who work, or provide services at a Novant Health facility. Last year, we administered more than 40,000 influenza vaccines and had an overall vaccination rate of more than 99%.

This document contains important information you need to know about the 2016 Influenza Vaccination Period. If you want more information about the flu vaccine, visit the CDC website or call Sue DeCamp-Freeze, RN, Sr. Director Infection Prevention at 704-213-0909; or David Priest, MD, Medical Director Antimicrobial Stewardship and Infection Prevention at 336-277-2315; or Jenny White, Employee Occupational Health Program Coordinator at 704-384-4692.

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Important Dates and Deadlines

- **October 1 – 27**: The 2016 influenza vaccination period. The flu vaccine will be offered at employee occupational health flu clinics during this time; see I-Connect for dates and times. Flu vaccines must be received by 2 p.m. on October 27.

- **September 15 at 5 p.m.**: The deadline for submitting medical or religious exemption requests and all associated paperwork. We are not able to process exemption requests submitted after September 15 at 5 pm.

- **October 27 at 2 p.m.**: The deadline for receiving the flu vaccine and submitting proof of vaccination if you have not been granted an exemption. Team Members who receive the flu vaccine after the deadline are not compliant with the mandatory vaccination program.

- **October 28 at 8 a.m.**: Team members who do not have an exemption and did not receive the flu vaccine or did not submit proof of vaccination by 2 p.m. on October 27 will be suspended for seven calendar days beginning at 8 a.m. on October 28. Those who received the vaccine prior to October
Flu Vaccine

- What kind of flu vaccine is being used this year? This year, we are using a quadrivalent vaccine that covers four of the most common types of flu viruses. This vaccine is also latex free, preservative free and egg free. In the past, we used a trivalent vaccine that only covered three of the most common flu viruses. We will also have a limited amount of the high-dose flu vaccine that is recommended for persons 65 and older. This vaccine will be offered to Novant Health team members who meet these criteria.

- Does Novant Health have flu vaccines that don’t include eggs, pork or mercury? Yes. Please ask the employee occupational health (EOH) nurse for these alternate vaccines when you present for your vaccination.
  - Eggs: Novant Health offers a flu vaccine option that does not use eggs in its production.
  - Pork: Novant Health has a vaccine option that does not contain pork.
  - Mercury or thimerosal: We do have preservative-free vaccine. Please note; however, that there is no evidence thimerosal is harmful.
  - Adjuvants/squalene: There are no adjuvants in the seasonal flu shot used in the United States. Squalene, which is used as an adjuvant in some vaccines, is a natural substance found in the oils of many different types of fish we eat. It has never been linked to any illness, including Gulf War Syndrome or autism.

- Can a breastfeeding mother receive a flu shot? Yes. Breastfeeding is fully compatible with flu vaccination, and preventing the flu in mothers can reduce the chance that the infant will get the flu. By breastfeeding, mothers pass on the antibodies that their bodies make in response to the flu shots to the infant, which can reduce the infant’s chances of getting the flu. This is especially important for infants less than six months old, who have no other way of receiving vaccine antibodies, since they are too young to be vaccinated.

Vaccination Period

- When is the 2016 flu vaccination period? The vaccination period is October 1 – October 27. The dates and times of the Novant Health team member flu clinics will be posted on I-Connect.

- What’s the deadline for getting the flu vaccine? The deadline is October 27 at 2 p.m. You must receive the flu vaccine by the deadline and submit documentation of vaccination by this time, unless you have an exemption. Receiving the flu vaccine after the deadline is not considered compliant.

- What happens if I don’t have an exemption and I do not get the flu vaccine or submit proof of vaccination by October 27 at 2 p.m.? Team members who do not have an exemption and did not receive the flu vaccine or did not submit proof of vaccination by 2 p.m. on October 27 will be suspended for seven calendar days beginning at 8 a.m. on October 28. Those who received the
vaccine prior to October 27 and failed to submit proof of vaccination can submit proof of vaccination during this time; however, team members who do not provide documentation that they received the flu vaccine by **October 27** at 2 p.m. will be considered to have resigned their employment at the end of the seven-day suspension. There will be no grace period.

- **Do I have to have my badge with me in order to get a flu vaccine at a Novant Health team member flu clinic?** Yes. You must have your Novant Health badge with you in order to get a flu vaccine. We use the badge to ensure correct recordkeeping and reporting.

- **Can I get the flu vaccine from a non-Novant Health location?** Yes. You may get the flu vaccine from a non-Novant Health location as long as you get the vaccine and submit proof of vaccination by the **October 27** 2 p.m. deadline. See the question below for flu vaccines received from NHmg providers.

- **How do I show proof that I got my flu shot at a non-Novant Health location?** To submit proof of vaccination, you need to scan and upload a copy of the proof of vaccination into Novant Health self service using the link located at: Self Service>Employee Forms>Influenza Confirmation Form. If you do not have access to scanning there are other options: You can take a picture of your documentation with your camera phone, email it to yourself then upload it. You can also fax the documentation to your regional EOH office. Contact your regional EOH office if you need help.

- **Do I have to submit proof of vaccination if I get the flu vaccine from my NHmg provider?** Yes. **You must submit proof of vaccination by 2 p.m. on October 27 if you get the vaccine from your NHmg provider, because the influenza database does not interface with EPIC.** You need to print a copy of your proof of vaccination from the Immunization section in MyChart or ask your NHmg provider for a copy of your completed influenza consent form. Scan and upload the document into self service using the link located at: Self-Service>Employee Forms>Influenza Confirmation Form. Contact your regional EOH office if you require assistance.

### Exemptions

- **When can I request a medical or religious exemption from the flu vaccine?** The Flu Exemption Committees will be evaluating new requests for exemption from the flu vaccine beginning on **August 15. The deadline for new exemption requests is September 15 at 5 p.m.** All exemption requests and supporting information must be submitted by the deadline. We are not able to process requests received after the deadline.

- **How do I submit a request for a medical or religious exemption?** Submit your completed exemption request form and all required information to the flu exemptions mailbox (**RZG648@novanthealth.org**) by September 15 at 5 p.m. We are not able to process requests received after September 15 at 5 p.m.

- **How will I know if my request for exemption was granted or not?** Exemption determinations are made within five days of receipt of submitting a request and the required paperwork. If your exemption request is approved, you and your department manager will receive a letter confirming the approval. Your manager will receive a flu sticker that you will need to affix to your badge indicating your exemption. Please remember that since you have been approved for an exemption, you will need to mask during the entire flu season. Information about masking can be found on I-Connect.
- My request for an exemption was denied. Do I still have to get the flu vaccine? Yes. You must get the flu vaccine by the 2 p.m. **October 27** deadline if you do not have an exemption.

- If I got an exemption last year, do I have to request an exemption again this year? No. You do not need to request another exemption unless there is a change in your medical condition or religious belief. Once an exemption is approved, it is considered permanent and in effect for all future flu seasons unless otherwise noted in your initial approval letter.

- I have been approved for an exemption from the flu vaccine. When do I have to begin wearing a mask if I am within six feet of patients? This year, the mandatory masking period will be determined by the prevalence of influenza infections in our communities. When our facilities reach a predetermined level of influenza infections, the mandatory masking period will begin. Team members with an approved exemption and their leaders will receive an email message from EOH that the masking period has begun.

- How long will I have to wear a mask? The mandatory masking period will end once the level of influenza infections has decreased to a predetermined level. You and your leader will receive an email message from EOH once the decision has been made to end the masking period.

**Patients & Guests**

- Will we mask patients who have signs and symptoms of the flu? The severity of the 2016 flu season may shape some of our decisions. However, we have measures in place to protect team members and other patients from someone within a facility who is exhibiting symptoms of any contagious illness. We just need to make sure that every team member adheres to these safety measures.
  - The first line of defense is at the check-in area. Staff must screen all patients and err on the side of caution. If you suspect that a patient is ill with flu-like symptoms, give him or her a mask and isolate as much as possible.
  - Place all suspect patients on droplet precautions as soon as you suspect flu-like illness. A nurse can implement isolation precautions and obtain the physician order at a later time.
  - Place a mask on all patients with suspected flu-like illness any time the patient is out of the room or being transported through the facility.
  - Team members who get sick with flu-like illness should stay home until they feel better and have been fever-free for at least 24 hours.

- Will we require our guests to wear masks or show proof of vaccination? Visitation is important to the health and wellness of our patients, so at this time, we have no plans to require masking or proof of vaccination for visitors. However, we will continue our practice of asking guests to refrain from visiting if they are ill even though we know that sometimes a visitor must come to the hospital when he or she is sick. In those cases during influenza season, we will ask visitors to wear a mask to help prevent the spread of illness to our staff and other hospital guests. While we would like everyone who has not been vaccinated to wear a mask, it is simply not feasible to do so. Our larger facilities can have as many as 10,000 visitors per day.

**Students, Vendors & Contractors**

- Will students be vaccinated so they can continue to volunteer, shadow and work in our facilities? Yes. We have many student programs that include middle school-aged children, high-school-aged
children and college students in clinical programs who volunteer, shadowing or participate in credit classes. The mandatory vaccination program applies to students in all of these programs as well. Students who show proof of vaccination are welcome to continue their participation. A student who cannot show proof of vaccination will not be permitted to continue in his or her program after **October 27** through the date that we determine flu season has ended. This is typically the March-April timeframe.

- **Are vendors required to vaccinate?** Yes. Vendors must follow the same process as our team members when visiting any Novant Health facility. Materials management staffs communicate this information to the 700+ vendors who are registered to do business with Novant Health. And if a vendor is in one of our facilities and appears ill, he or she should be asked to leave immediately. The health of our patients and staff is our top priority.

- **Can contract team members and clinical rotation students get the flu vaccine at a Novant Health team member flu clinic?** Yes. We will provide the flu vaccine to contract team members and students as long as we have the vaccine available.

**New Team Members**

- **How will new team members get their flu shot?** New team members will receive the influenza vaccine or may request an exemption when they report to EOH for the new team member health screening.

- **Are you telling prospective team members about the mandatory flu vaccine?** Yes. All potential team members are notified that we have a mandatory influenza vaccination program. Team members are also asked to sign an attestation form informing them of the mandatory influenza program upon hire.