Infectious Diseases Experts Call for Mandatory Immunization of Health Care Personnel

Three Leading Infectious Diseases Societies Say Immunization Should be Condition of Employment in Healthcare Facilities

(Arlington, Va.)—In a joint policy statement released today, the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA), the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA), and the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society (PIDS) call for mandatory, universal immunization of health care personnel as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP).

ACIP recommendations for health care personnel currently include vaccination against influenza, measles, pertussis (whooping cough), hepatitis B, and varicella (chicken pox). A complete list of ACIP-recommended vaccines for health care personnel can be found here. (link)

Some voluntary health care personnel vaccination programs have been effective when combined with strong institutional leadership and robust educational campaigns, say the Societies. However, for the vast majority of facilities, mandatory immunization programs are necessary to achieve target immunization rates. The policy calls for documentation of immunity or receipt of recommended vaccinations as a condition of employment, unpaid service, or receipt of professional privileges.

“Immunization rates for ACIP-recommended vaccines remain low among health care personnel,” said Barbara Murray, MD, president of IDSA. “When voluntary programs fall short, we think vaccination should be a condition of employment for the protection of both patients and health care workers from illness and death associated with these diseases.”

Those who cannot be vaccinated due to medical contraindications or because of vaccine supply shortages may need to be reassigned away from direct patient care or take other infection control measures. “ACIP-recommended vaccines are proven to be safe, effective and cost-saving,” said Daniel Diekema, MD, president-elect of SHEA. “Although there may be exceptions made for individuals for whom vaccination is not appropriate or in circumstances when the vaccine is not available, these exceptions should be extremely rare.” Notably, the policy does not provide for exemptions based on personal belief or religion.

The Societies have previously called for mandatory influenza vaccination for health care personnel. “This new statement adds to this by recognizing the significant threat that other pathogens pose for the health of patients and health care workers in the healthcare setting,” said David Kimberlin, MD, president of PIDS. The Societies also support requiring health care employers to engage in comprehensive educational efforts to inform health care personnel about the benefits of immunization and the risks of not maintaining immunization.

See the full policy statement on mandatory vaccination of health care personnel (link).

- Related IDSA policy statement on mandatory immunization of health care personnel against seasonal and pandemic influenza (link).
- Related SHEA position paper on influenza vaccination of health care personnel (link).

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