

Vaccinations in the workplace

Dear Member,

As I am sure you have all noticed, there has been an increased push for aged care workers to get influenza vaccines this season. This is largely due to health minister Greg Hunt and aged care minister Ken Wyatt's decision to introduce mandatory employer offered vaccinations.

To be clear, this newsletter is not about debating the pros and cons of vaccinating. It is to inform members of their workplace rights. Different employers have had different responses to the ministers' decision. While some have continued the same approach they have always taken in offering vaccinations and encouraging you to get vaccinated, others have been far more heavy handed. Some have even tried to force staff to sign documents admitting liability for any sickness or injury caused. Others have threatened to take hours away from members or even stand them down without pay. The list goes on.

So what if you refuse a vaccination?

To be clear, the minister declared it was mandatory for employers to offer the vaccine. It is **not** mandatory for workers to get vaccinated. Please see the minister's press release attached to this newsletter. Therefore you do have the right to refuse. However, management do have the right to take steps to mitigate risks to their residents.

Visiting officials and our Member Services Division have received numerous questions about being disciplined for refusing a vaccination. The reality is this: you have minimum contracted hours and rostered hours. If your employer chooses to stand you down they must pay you. You are simply following a lawful direction not to come to work. Your rostered hours are to be put out a fortnight in advance. So if you are stood down for that fortnight, you are to be paid your rostered hours for that fortnight. Future hours should be paid as your minimum contracted hours.

Alternative infection control

Any aged care worker knows the importance of infection control. And there is no doubt that immunisation is a huge part of that. The more people that are vaccinated, the fewer people that will get sick. And we know that, anecdotally, the majority of staff have been vaccinated this season.

So what are the risks if one or two staff that may either suffer adverse effects from the fluvax, or just oppose vaccinations, don't get vaccinated? And what other steps can management take to control infection for healthy unvaccinated staff? Masking,

gloving and use of hand sanitiser are just a few examples. The reality is that some people do suffer serious adverse effects to vaccinations. Employers need to carefully consider why they are standing down healthy employees.

Compare one or two unvaccinated staff members to the number of family members flowing in and out of aged care facilities. Kids with runny noses. Family members stumbling in saying they have been sick but had to come in and see Mum. Perhaps in future, aged care providers could offer vaccinations to family members free of charge.

If you feel you have being pressured into taking a vaccination that you are not comfortable with, you should contact the HSU's Member Services Division on 1300 478 679. Only HSU members will receive assistance with this or any other workplace issue. If you are not already a member of the HSU, there is no time like the present to join. You can join online at www.hsu.asn.au/join or over the phone on 1300 478 679.

In unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gerard Hayes', with a long, sweeping underline.

Gerard Hayes
Secretary, HSU NSW/ACT/QLD



The Hon Greg Hunt, MP

**Minister for Health
Member for Flinders**

The Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP

**Minister for Aged Care
Minister for Indigenous Health
Member for Hasluck**

MEDIA RELEASE

22 April 2018

MANDATORY VACCINE PROGRAMS TO CURB AGED CARE INFLUENZA

The provision of influenza vaccination programs to all staff in residential aged care homes will be compulsory, as the Turnbull Government moves to maximise protection for senior Australians ahead of this year's this flu season.

Health Minister Greg Hunt and Aged Care Minister Ken Wyatt announced the Government will mandate flu vaccines for aged care workers and today released results of a survey showing a significant link between increased staff immunisation and lower aged care influenza outbreaks.

"It will now be mandatory for every aged care provider to offer the flu vaccine to every single worker", Minister Hunt said.

"Already we have made two new ground-breaking flu vaccines available to over three million Australians aged 65 years and over - free of charge.

"Today we are taking further steps to ensure those seniors are protected even more, ahead of this year's flu season."

Minister Wyatt said: "Last winter, aged care homes with only a quarter of their staff vaccinated had a 25 per cent higher rate of flu outbreaks than those with three quarters or more of their staff vaccinated.

"This is why we are taking strong action to ensure the safety of senior Australians in aged care."

Last year, just over 1,100 influenza-associated deaths were reported in Australia, with people aged 65 years and older accounting for more than 90 per cent of these.

Minister Wyatt ordered the Australian Aged Care Quality Agency to review two aged care homes in Victoria and Tasmania, where 18 people died.

“Alarming, in these two locations, well under half of the staff had been vaccinated,” Minister Wyatt said. “Infection control was further compromised as dozens of staff were struck down with the flu, compounding a deadly situation.

“What this policy will do is offer every person a flu vaccination.”

The subsequent national survey of the 2,609 homes revealed:

- Only 3.5 per cent had the recommended staff coverage of 95 per cent or higher to gain herd immunity
- 35.9 per cent had the recommended resident coverage of 95 per cent or higher
- 43 per cent reported at least one influenza outbreak in the previous year
- Those providing in-house staff vaccination programs had higher coverage than those who only encouraged staff to go to an external immunisation provider

In the lead up to the 2018 influenza season, the Quality Agency undertook an extensive awareness campaign within the aged care industry, targeted vaccination records of residents and staff and implemented practices that have been shown to increase vaccination uptake.

“Vaccination is imperative for staff and residents in aged care, where the flu can spread quickly and have devastating consequences,” said Minister Wyatt.

“I urge all Australians to have their flu shot, especially those who regularly visit loved ones living in aged care homes.

“Every one of us has a responsibility to reduce the chance of spreading the virus among some of our most vulnerable citizens.”

Media contacts: Minister Hunt – Ben Wicks 0422 692 989
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