

UCSF Workplace Guidelines for Influenza
January 9, 2004

Although the worst of the influenza epidemic is probably behind us, there is still a high level of influenza in the community and may be for months to come. Influenza is a serious disease that kills over 36,000 Americans each year. This year the virus has struck early and aggressively causing widespread illness across our country. All health care workers must take extra care to protect themselves and patients from the flu. These guidelines were developed to remind staff to do their part in reducing the spread of this disease. Please review the following important information.

Do Not come to work if you have the following symptoms, as you may expose others. You must notify your supervisor or manager about your absence. You can still get the flu, even if you have had a flu shot, as it does not cover all strains:

- ❑ *Acute illness with fever (100.4F)*
- ❑ *Diarrhea*
- ❑ *Significant respiratory infections (flu, pneumonia, bronchitis, persistent cough) with systemic symptoms, such as fever, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, severe headache, profound fatigue, and/or muscle ache.*
- ❑ *You may return to work when you do not have a fever and are feeling better.*

Is it a Cold or the Flu? (Adapted from the CDC)

Symptoms	Cold	Flu
Fever	Rare in adults	Usually 102 F to 104 F; usually lasts 3 to 4 days
Headache	Rare	Sudden onset and can be severe
Muscle aches	Mild	Usual and often severe
Tiredness and weakness	Mild	Extreme; can last two or more weeks
Extreme exhaustion	Never	Sudden onset and severe
Runny nose, sneezing, sore throat	Often	Sometimes
Cough	Mild hacking cough	Usual; can be severe

Transmission: Flu viruses are spread when a person with the flu coughs, sneezes or speaks and spreads virus-laden droplets into the air. The virus can also be spread when a person touches a surface with flu viruses on it (for example, a door handle) and then touches his/her eyes, nose or mouth. Adults may be contagious from 1 day before developing symptoms to up to 7 days after getting sick.

Methods for reducing the spread of influenza:

- ❑ **Hand washing** is one of the most basic and proven methods for preventing the spread of disease. Wash your hands frequently. Have alcohol-based sanitizers in convenient locations for your staff and patients. Encourage others (patients and staff) to wash their hands, especially after coughing, sneezing or using commonly shared items such as phones, key boards, pens, fax machines or other equipment.
- ❑ **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Ask the same of your patients and visitors. Ensure that the “*Cover Your Cough*” signage is posted at all reception areas reminding people about this. Have surgical masks available for patients who have upper respiratory symptoms.
- ❑ **Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.** Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
- ❑ **Avoid close contact** with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others as well. When taking care of patients, be sure to follow appropriate infection control precautions at all times.
- ❑ **Avoid exposing** others to the flu. It is best to avoid public and family gatherings and to avoid running errands when you have the flu symptoms described above.

DO:

- ❑ **Notify** your supervisor or manager regarding your absence if you are sick. Make sure that you let him/her know if you have influenza and think you have exposed patients or co-workers. This is important as your patient may be a candidate for one of the anti-viral medications that can prevent or lessen the effects of influenza.
- ❑ **Contact** your primary care provider if you think you have the flu. You may be able to take one of the new antiviral medications. There are antiviral medications against both Influenza A and B. The medications may lessen the severity of the illness and can possibly shorten the course of the illness, but must be started within the first 2 days of illness.
- ❑ **Get the Flu vaccine.** A limited supply of vaccine is still available for health care workers in high-risk areas. It is not too late in the season and quite appropriate as long as there is still influenza activity in the community.

For Medical Center Employees exposed to a suspect or known case of influenza

You may be able to take an antiviral medication to prevent the flu. If you were exposed as part of your job here at the Medical Center, notify Infection Control and then contact the Exposure Hotline at 719-3898 for post-exposure evaluation. If you were exposed outside of work, contact your primary care provider. These medications are available by prescription only. *This policy is in effect only during this flu season due to the outbreak.*

DO NOT:

- ❑ Do not report to work if you have any of the symptoms listed above.
- ❑ Do not try to work sick and just wear a mask. This is not adequate protection for patients or co-workers.
- ❑ Do not get the Flu Mist vaccine. It is a live virus. Anyone who receives it cannot work around patients for the three weeks following administration.

If you have questions:

- ❑ **Medical Center Employees** should contact [Employee Health Services \(885-7580\)](#) or [Infection Control \(476-5793\)](#).
- ❑ **Campus Employees** should contact the Communicable Disease Program (CDP) (514-3861)
- ❑ **Students** should contact Student Health Services (SHS) (476-1281)

These guidelines are based on recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Medical Center Infection Control Policies. For more information on influenza or other communicable diseases consult the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod>, or the Infection Control website at http://infectioncontrol.ucsfmedicalcenter.org/body_index.html or the Communicable Disease Prevention program website at <http://cdp.ucsf.edu>

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