



Do Your Part to Protect Others: Get Shot!

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Hey You! You call yourself a “Safety Professional” and you probably tout a bunch of acronyms at the end of your name promoting your “safety expertise.” But are you really all that safe to be around? ***Specifically, are you properly immunized?*** If not, you may unknowingly be a walking threat to those around you. Let’s be clear, I’m not asking about whether your children or grandchildren are vaccinated (that’s a topic for another day)... I’m asking about YOU! And I’m not just asking whether you’ve gotten your annual flu vaccine. I’m asking whether ALL of your vaccinations are up to date.

We tend to think that immunizations are just for children. In reality however, to ensure our best health and that of those around us, immunizations are needed throughout our lifetimes. This is because protection from some childhood vaccines usually wears off over time; and adults are also at risk for vaccine-preventable disease due to factors such as: age, job, lifestyle, health or travel.

In the workplace, adult immunizations are extremely important to prevent groups of employees from becoming sick and to avoid the related problems due to lost work days, lost productivity, overtime costs, or worse yet, having sick employees reporting to work while they are contagious.

Indeed, the recent measles outbreak that occurred in the state of Washington led to Washington Governor declaring a state public health emergency in January 2019! The local health department confirmed that all cases were individuals who had not received the two dose MMR vaccination which prevents against measles, mumps and rubella.

Measles is highly contagious disease and potentially fatal to young children. Public health officials have been predicting epidemics in Washington and Oregon, since both states allow people to opt out of vaccinations for personal reasons, which results in low immunization rates.

Have you heard of the terms “herd immunity” or “community immunity”? They mean that the safety and health of your community (and workplace) relies on you doing your part to be properly vaccinated. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, community immunity works this way:

“Germs can travel quickly through a community and make a lot of people sick. If enough people get sick, it can lead to an outbreak. But when enough people are vaccinated against a certain disease, the germs can’t travel as easily from person to person — and the entire community is less likely to get the disease.

That means even people who can’t get vaccinated will have some protection from getting sick. And if a person does get sick, there’s less chance of an outbreak because it’s harder for the disease to spread. Eventually, the disease becomes rare — and sometimes, it’s wiped out altogether.”

In an attempt to prevent another pandemic like the 2010 H1N1 influenza global outbreak, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) evaluated vaccination coverage and attitudes among a group of public-school employees and reported the following:

“NIOSH HHE Program investigators surveyed 412 of 841 school district employees. Of the respondents, 58% reported getting the flu vaccine for the 2012-2013 flu season. Most employees reported getting the flu vaccine at the school district central office. Investigators found that employees who had positive attitudes and perceptions about the flu vaccine and those who had received the flu vaccine the year before were more likely to have been vaccinated. The most common reasons for not getting the flu vaccine were beliefs that employees did not need the vaccine, that the vaccine did not work, and that the employees did not have time to get vaccinated.”

According to the CDC, “All adults need immunizations to help them prevent getting and spreading serious diseases that could result in poor health, missed work, medical bills, and not being able to care for family.”

As a minimum, CDC recommends that adults get the following:

- Seasonal flu vaccine yearly to protect them from influenza.
- Tdap vaccine for pertussis (whooping cough) is recommended once for all adults. (This includes adults who were fully vaccinated as children or had the disease as children.)
- Td booster for tetanus and diphtheria every 10 years.

Several factors, such as age, lifestyle, health, risks, travel and prior immunizations will determine the specific vaccinations you will need. Review the tabs at this CDC site to see what other vaccines you should get: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults/rec-vac/index.html>. Then, at your next doctor visit ask about getting all of your recommended immunization shots.

Do it for your safety and for the safety of everyone you come in contact with. Remember, “You Never Outgrow the Need for Vaccines!”

References

CDC Flu in the Workplace <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/flu/hhe-projects.html>

Vaccines Protect Your Community <https://www.vaccines.gov/basics/work/protection/index.html>

CDC What Vaccines Are Recommended for You <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults/rec-vac/index.html>

CDC Immunization Schedule for Adults <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/easy-to-read/adult.html>

Washington State Department of Health <https://www.doh.wa.gov>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Maria Mitchell is the former Manager of Risk Management & Safety for Miami-Dade County. She has over thirty years of experience promoting safety, health and sustainability in the public and private sector. Her extensive experience provided Miami-Dade County (population 2.7 million) with policies, planning and oversight for safety and health issues for the county's 28,000 employees, 25 departments and extensive public services. Ms. Mitchell holds professional certifications including Certified Safety Manager and Certified Sustainability Manager. She has graduate and undergraduate degrees in Environmental Health Science from the University of Miami and University of Georgia. Ms. Mitchell is an adjunct university professor at Florida International University and Barry University. In March 2017, she ran for public office and was elected as Councilwoman for her hometown City of Miami Springs. She serves on the National Safety Council's Government and Public-Sector Leadership Board. Ms. Mitchell is also Editor of the Florida Occupational Injury and Illness Coalition Journal. In 2014 she initiated a collaboration between CDC NIOSH and Miami-Dade Public Schools to implement a Safety Skills Curriculum program within Miami-Dade Public Schools. Her new project, S-Words Initiatives, promotes the understanding and incorporation of safety, sustainability and stewardship in public and private sector organizations.



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