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## ***Health Advisory***

### **JOINT COMMISSION ESTABLISHES INFECTION CONTROL STANDARD TO ADDRESS INFLUENZA VACCINES FOR STAFF**

July 18, 2006

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations announced on June 13, 2006, the approval of an infection control standard that requires accredited organizations to offer influenza vaccinations to staff, which includes volunteers and licensed independent practitioners with close patient contact. The standard will become an accreditation requirement beginning January 1, 2007, for the Critical Access Hospital, Hospital and Long-Term—Care accreditation programs.

"Preventing the spread of the flu protects patients and saves lives. Encouraging healthcare workers to be vaccinated can play a vital role in stopping the transmission of this potentially fatal infection," says Robert Wise, MD, vice president, Division of Standards and Survey Methods, Joint Commission.

The Joint Commission developed the standard in response to recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) making the reduction of influenza transmission from healthcare professionals to patients a top priority in the United States. While the CDC has urged annual influenza vaccination for healthcare workers since 1981, the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report published earlier this year calls for stronger steps to increase influenza vaccination of healthcare workers. Despite the recommendations, the vaccination rates as measured by the CDC remain low.

Studies show that influenza causes 36,000 deaths and [more than] 200,000 hospitalizations on average in the United States annually. Furthermore, healthcare-associated transmission of influenza has been documented among many patient populations in a variety of clinical settings, and infections have been linked epidemiologically to unvaccinated healthcare workers. Typically, fewer than 40 percent of healthcare workers are immunized each year.

The new Joint Commission standard requires organizations to:

- Establish an annual influenza vaccination program that includes at least staff and licensed independent practitioners;
- Provide access to influenza vaccinations on site;
- Educate staff and licensed independent practitioners about flu vaccination; non-vaccine control measures (such as the use of appropriate precautions); and diagnosis, transmission, and potential impact of influenza;
- Annually evaluate vaccination rates and reasons for non-participation in the organization's immunization program; and
- Implement enhancements to the program to increase participation.

To access the press release from the JCAHO website, go to:  
[http://www.jointcommission.org/newsroom/newsreleases/nr\\_06\\_13\\_06.htm](http://www.jointcommission.org/newsroom/newsreleases/nr_06_13_06.htm)

This Health Advisory has sent to you by the Philadelphia Department of Public Health's Immunization Program. For questions about immunizations, please contact PDPH at 215-685-6748.