Flu season is here, and it’s important to stay well. Protect yourself, your family, co-workers, and members and patients: GET A FREE FLU SHOT AT YOUR WORKSITE.

FLU FACTS

Influenza is the sixth leading cause of death in adults in the United States. Twenty percent of unprotected people will develop the flu each year, raising the risk of transmitting the virus to others—including to our patients and our own families.

Pregnant women, the elderly and people with ongoing health conditions are especially at risk.

Flu immunization is the most effective way to prevent infection and complications, providing up to 90 percent protection.

The Centers for Disease Control recommends flu vaccination for everyone over age six months and for all health care personnel.

Research shows the following benefits of immunization in healthy working adults:

• 25 percent fewer upper respiratory infections;
• 43 percent fewer sick days taken;
• 44 percent fewer visits to physicians for respiratory infections;
• Estimated cost savings of about $47 per person vaccinated. (Multiplied by thousands of KP workers, that’s money that can be used to serve our members and patients or reduce the cost of care.)

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For more information about preventing or treating the flu, visit kp.org/flu.
Why are we being asked to take the flu shot?
Flu can be acquired both in the health care setting and in the community. Health care workers can easily transmit the virus to patients in their care and to their families.

Does the vaccine really work?
The flu vaccine is not perfect, but it does help prevent vaccinated people from getting the flu. Each year the vaccine does not exactly match the mixture of flu virus circulating during the season. Vaccine effectiveness is about 60 percent for healthy adults. Yes, vaccinated people can still get the flu, but the chances of getting it are reduced, and the illness may be less severe. The vaccine cannot prevent flu-like illnesses that are caused by other viruses (not influenza virus).

Can a flu shot give me the flu?
The flu shot cannot give you the flu. It uses inactivated (“dead”) virus, which helps prepare our immune system to fight the flu should we come in contact with it. Some people feel rundown for a while after the flu shot, as the immune system responds to the vaccine. This is not the flu.

What if I get the flu?
You should stay at home if you have flu symptoms (fever and respiratory symptoms), until at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever (without taking fever-reducing medicine). If you are at work when symptoms develop, stop patient care activity, put on a facemask, and promptly notify your supervisor.

I got vaccinated last year, why do I need a flu shot again?
Last year’s flu vaccine was well matched to the flu viruses in the community. This year’s predicted flu viruses and components of flu vaccine will be the same as last year’s. However, since flu vaccine only provides protection for a single flu season, people who received the vaccine last year should get it again this year.

I never get sick, and I’m not in a high-risk group. Why do I need the flu shot?
Even the healthiest people are at risk. You can be infected, not feel ill, and still transmit flu to at-risk patients, as well as to friends and family members.

I don’t like needles, are there alternatives?
Try FluMist, the nasal flu vaccine. It’s available for healthy non-pregnant employees younger than 50.

Is the flu vaccine safe? What about possible adverse reactions?
Research continually confirms the safety of flu vaccine. Local short-term reactions—such as soreness at the vaccination site, slight fever, an achy feeling—don’t happen often and usually do not last long. Over-the-counter medicines are helpful for these reactions. And such short-term reactions are much less bothersome than catching the flu and feeling very sick for days.

What about allergic reactions or Guillain-Barré syndrome?
Having a true allergic reaction to any flu vaccine is extremely rare. If you have had Guillain-Barré syndrome, you should discuss the appropriateness of receiving the vaccine with your physician. People with egg allergies should discuss the flu vaccine with their provider as most people with egg allergies can safely receive flu vaccine.

Is vaccination required?
Participation is strictly voluntary. However as a matter of pride—and to retain the confidence of KP members, patients and the public—it’s important to have high rates of participation.