



Frequently Asked Questions about the Houston Methodist Flu Vaccination Policy

Q: Am I required to get the seasonal flu vaccine?

A: All Houston Methodist employees are required to comply with the annual influenza program. Our policy (HR93) also covers volunteers, physicians, students, contractors and vendors. It is our obligation to our patients to be vaccinated. Our goal is for 100 percent of our employees to be vaccinated. This year, you must receive your flu vaccine between Sept. 23 and Nov. 15 in order to be in compliance with our policy.

Q: Why is it required?

A: In the U.S., thousands of individuals die each year from the flu, and many thousands more are hospitalized. We should do our part to keep our patients and families as safe as possible while in the hospital. We understand that you may not have made this choice on your own and appreciate your willingness to go above and beyond for the safety and well-being of your patients. It's in keeping with our I CARE values. In addition, you are helping protect your co-workers, their families, the young, the old and the susceptible individuals in our communities.

Q: I heard Texas has a state law requiring hospitals to assure patients are protected from vaccine preventable diseases and mandating that health care workers and providers have immunizations including flu shots. Is this accurate?

A: Yes. A state law passed in 2011 requires hospitals to have policies such as ours that mandate all health care workers and providers receive immunizations for vaccine preventable diseases.

Q: Are there any exceptions made?

A: Yes. Houston Methodist recognizes that certain religions or rare medical contraindications would prevent an employee from getting a vaccine. If this is the case you must submit a completed exemption form each year that you are requesting such exemption (any approved exemptions are valid only for the year in which they were approved). This process includes:

1. The employee submits a completed ***Request for Medical Exemption from Influenza Vaccination form*** to Employee Health no later than Nov 1. This form must be completed and signed by your physician. It must include reason for medical exemption.
2. The employee submits a completed ***Request for Religious Exemption from Influenza Vaccination form*** to Employee Health no later than Nov 1. The form must describe your sincerely held religious belief that requires an exemption to the flu vaccine.

2. Employee Health may require additional clarification for forms that are not completed fully. Otherwise, the ***Request for Medical/Religious Exemption from Influenza Vaccination forms*** will be considered approved if received in a timely manner and fully completed.

3. Non-vaccinated employees who work in patient facing departments will be required to wear a surgical mask for the duration of flu season (September-March). Failure to comply with the protective measure requirements (based on job role) for those exempt from having the flu shot during flu season will result in the following consequences:

- First incident for failure to comply with required protective measures – three-day suspension (unpaid).
- Subsequent incident – termination.

Q: What if I am not exempt or if I refuse?

A: There are serious consequences incorporated into our policy for employees who don't get vaccinated and don't have a valid exemption completed by this year's Nov. 15, 2019 deadline. Failure to comply will result in the following consequences:

- Placement on unpaid suspension for up to 14 days so the employee may become compliant (PTO may not be used during this period). Employees who were suspended previously for failure to comply on a timely basis with this policy or other required competency assessments will result in immediate termination.

Employees who have not received the immunization or have not been approved for an exemption by the end of the 14-day suspension period will be terminated.

Q: Is the flu shot safe?

A: Yes. The viruses contained in flu shots are inactivated, which means they cannot cause infection. Flu vaccine manufacturers kill the viruses used in the injected vaccine during the process of making vaccine, and batches of flu vaccine are tested to make sure they are safe. The risk of a flu shot causing serious harm is extremely rare, and its benefits are great.

Q: When will the vaccine be available, and where do I get the vaccine?

A: The vaccine will be available beginning on Sep. 23. You can drop by your Employee Health Clinic to get the vaccination, or at scheduled vaccine stations. The sooner you get the shot, the better chance you have of staying healthy.

Q: Is the seasonal flu shot safe for pregnant women?

A: Yes. Not only is it safe for pregnant women to receive the flu shot, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and medical specialty societies of Obstetrics and Pediatrics recommend that all pregnant women receive the seasonal flu vaccine. Pregnant women are more susceptible to serious complications and hospitalization from the flu than the general population. All vaccines supplied are thimerosal (mercury preservative) free.

Q: What if I get my vaccine outside of Houston Methodist?

A: As long as you are vaccinated and provide supporting documentation, including the provider's contact information, you are compliant with the vaccination policy. If you cannot provide documentation, you will be required to receive another vaccination.

Q: I hear that you can get the flu from a flu shot, is that true?

A: Absolutely not. The flu shot does not contain a live virus, and you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. Some people get a slight irritation at the inoculation site.

Q: I have an egg allergy.

A: Check with your local Employee Health Clinic. There are egg free vaccinations available.

Q: I have a latex allergy.

A: For 2019-2020 season, there are latex free vaccinations available.

Q: I received the flu vaccine from my PCP, how do I receive credit for it?

A: Submit documentation via email to the Employee Health Clinic. Documentation should include the following in order to receive credit:

Employee Name
 Date of Birth
 Date received
 Location

Name of Influenza Vaccine and Lot #
Site given
Name/signature of person administering vaccine
Contact phone number

Q: What if I still have questions?

A: Please ask your manager, contact your HR representative or the employee health department.

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