

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Getting Fluent About the Flu

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Flu season, typically beginning in October and peaking in November and December, is often a time of increased sick days, healthcare utilization and caregiver absence for employees. To help mitigate the impacts of the flu season, employers should first understand the flu and then consider potential action steps.

What is the Flu?

Influenza, more commonly known as the “flu,” is a respiratory illness caused by a virus that infects the nose, throat or lungs. It is contagious, causing mild to severe illness and is sometimes fatal.¹ Flu viruses are primarily spread via respiratory droplets when an infected person speaks, coughs or sneezes.² Different flu strains are circulating each year. The most common variants are H1N1 and H3N2.³

On average, 8% of the US population (over 26 million people) are infected with the flu each season.⁴ The flu vaccine is modified by scientists each year according to the circulating strains, making it essential to receive it each year. Other respiratory viruses typically circulate at the same time as the flu, like RSV and COVID-19. This trio is often referred to as the “tripledeemic.” You can learn more about it [here](#).

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/keyfacts.htm>

2. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/keyfacts.htm>

3. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/keyfacts.htm>

Importance and Timing of Flu Shots

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that individuals six months and older receive the flu shot annually. People at the highest risk of serious illness from the flu include those 65 years and older, people of any age with chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, obesity or heart disease, pregnant people, and children younger than five years old.⁵ Individuals should always consult with their healthcare provider to discuss if they are at an increased risk of serious illness from the flu.

Employers should encourage employees to get their annual flu shot in September or October.⁶ This is before flu season begins and offers the most protection, although receiving it at any point during flu season is still beneficial. It may be appropriate to recommend employees get their flu vaccination and COVID-19 booster simultaneously, which is a safe and convenient option. Because the

4. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/keyfacts.htm>

5. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/keyfacts.htm>

6. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/acip/summary/summary-recommendations.htm#timing>



flu vaccine contains inactivated virus, it cannot give someone the flu,⁷ but short-term side effects, such as headache and fatigue, can occur as the immune system prepares antibodies to fight the virus.⁸

Although flu shots may not completely prevent the flu, adults who get their flu shot have an 82% lower chance of being admitted to the intensive care unit.⁹ For the 2022-2023 flu season, the CDC estimated the annual flu vaccine prevented roughly six million flu cases, 65,000 hospitalizations and 3,700 deaths.¹⁰

Other Ways to Shoo the Flu

There are actions employers can take that may reduce the spread of the flu within their workplace, such as:

- Encouraging timely and frequent hand washing with soap or providing alcohol-based cleansers
- Keeping commonly accessed surfaces sanitized
- Reminding employees to cover coughs and sneezes
- Offering employees the option to work from home or take time off if they are sick
- Encouraging the use of face masks if on-site work is required and employees are ill

Employers can help lower the rates and severity of the flu this season by using good judgment and keeping these tips in mind. Contact your Brown & Brown representative with any questions or to discuss additional actions to prevent flu transmission.



Benefits of Holding an On-Site Flu Clinic

- Convenient for employees
- Positive impact on productivity
- Reduces flu transmission
- Reduces absences and costs associated with absenteeism
- Emphasizes a strong culture of well-being

Additional Tips

- Offer incentives such as gift cards to drive engagement
- Consider holding in combination with a wellness fair
- Ask your health insurance carrier for recommended vendors
- Provide at least four to eight weeks of lead time for vendors

For a detailed step-by-step guide to setting up an onsite flu shot clinic, reach out to your Brown & Brown representative.

7. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/misconceptions.htm>

8. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/flushot.htm#:~:text=Common%20side%20effects%20from%20a%20flu%20shot,like%20other%20injections%2C%20can%20occasionally%20cause%20fainting>

9. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/misconceptions.htm>

10. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/spotlights/2023-2024/flu-vaccine-benefits.htm#:~:text=In%20people%20who%20get%20vaccinated,65%2C000%20hospitalizations%2C%20and%203%2C700%20deaths>

About the Authors



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Rachel Jansen serves as a Consultant, Population Health & Well-Being and works with customers within the corporate well-being space focused on program strategy, communication, and analysis to build positive workplace cultures. Prior to joining Brown & Brown she worked at Unite Us, managing large health plan accounts and ensuring members had equitable access to quality care and address social determinants of health. She also spent nearly seven years at Cigna, with much of her time as a Senior Engagement Consultant. Rachel earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Health Promotion and Wellness from the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point and her MBA from Rollins College.



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Rachel Piccolino is a Population Health & Well-Being Senior Analyst for Brown & Brown. She possesses deep experience in healthcare consulting, focusing on health policy, Medicare, Veteran and military health and other federal health programs. Prior to joining Brown & Brown, Rachel served as a federal healthcare consultant for a small federal government consulting firm located just outside Washington, DC. Her clients included the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense. Rachel earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology with a minor in Medical Humanities from Boston College. Rachel also holds a Master of Public Health in Health Policy from The George Washington University and is a member of the American Public Health Association.



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