

# Health system achieves high flu vaccination rates by mandating masking

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Geisinger Health System vaccinated more than 92% of all employees against influenza this season, with a modification of a mandatory program. On average, fewer than half of all healthcare workers receive flu vaccinations.

In an article published in July's *Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology*, the journal of the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America, Dr. Lisa Esolen demonstrated the effectiveness of Geisinger's [influenza](#) vaccination that helped achieve high rates of vaccine compliance for two consecutive years. This past season, 2010-2011, Geisinger had vaccinated 95% of clinical employees and 92% of all employees by mid-December. Since hospitals continue to release vaccine until the end of March, final vaccination rates were not known at that the time of this publication.

"Influenza vaccination rates among hospital employees has received extensive attention in recent years," said Lisa Esolen, MD, Systems Director, Infection Control Geisinger Health System "[Healthcare workers](#) are critical to limiting the spread of influenza since they are exposed to numerous sick patients and can readily spread the infection from patient to patient."

To increase vaccination rates among staff, some hospitals have embraced a mandatory approach - get vaccinated or lose your job. However, Geisinger [Health System](#) chose a slightly different approach. The 14,000-employee system decided to allow staff members to opt out of receiving the [flu](#) vaccine for ethical or medical reasons, but required that those who did opt out would need to wear a facemask for the entire flu season, extending from November 1 to March 31. All vaccinated employees were known by a campaign sticker placed on their identification badge - no sticker meant the employee needed to wear a mask whenever they were within five or six feet of any other person throughout the entire day.

"We're proud of the success we had and the team building it inspired, encouraging each unit to act as a team to achieve full vaccination." said Dr. Esolen.

**More information:** Lisa M. Esolen, Kimberly L. Kilheeneey, Richard E. Merkle and Albert Bothe, "An Alternate Approach to Improving Healthcare Worker Influenza Vaccination Rates." *Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology* 32:7 (July 2011), pp. 703-705

Provided by Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America

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