

NY Healthcare workers must get a flu shot (or wear a mask?): A failure of will

By ACSH Staff — September 18, 2013



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Flu season is quickly approaching and with its impending arrival comes the [argument of](#) ^[2] whether or not it should be mandatory for healthcare workers to be vaccinated. New York State is requiring healthcare workers who are in close contact with patients to either get the flu shot or wear a mask. These rules will apply to more than 4000 hospitals, clinics, diagnostic centers, nursing homes, hospices and home care agencies in the state, but do not apply to those visiting the hospital such as families of patients.

Rhode Island issued similar regulations last flu season, mandating either a flu shot or requiring workers to wear a mask when interacting with patients. Their regulations also included a \$100 fine for failure to comply with rules. However, opposition to New York's regulation still remains, with some unions which represent health care workers especially, for some strange reason, nurses claiming that the requirement is coercive. The opponents of mandatory vaccination also highlighted the limited effect of the flu vaccine. Instead, they propose that workers should be given more sick days so they can stay home while ill. Nice try.

The flu shot was about 62 percent effective last year. Records indicate that there were about 45,000 cases in New York during the last flu season, including about 9500 hospitalizations. A typical flu season lasts about 22 weeks.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross had this to say: These measures are merely window-dressing, do not address the problem of viral transmission to sick patients, and merely sweeps the issue under the rug. A mandate would be coercive that's what mandate means, because the workers' right to not be vaccinated ends at the respiratory tract of a sick patient. The vaccinate or wear a mask regulation is a pusillanimous kowtow to the hospital workers' unions, especially the nurses. Healthcare workers who refuse to be immunized against influenza should NOT be allowed to take care of, or even be near, sick and immunocompromised patients! The give us more sick days approach is self-serving and far worse, ineffective, as flu virus is transmitted (easily) before the contagion is clinically apparent, and I believe the nursing spokesperson knows, or should know

that. Masks are known to be essentially useless in preventing flu transmission, so that's simply propaganda rather than patient protection. Saying the vaccine is only 60+% effective is completely illogical, since any protection is way better than zero. The NYS Department of Health and the NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation should make flu vaccination mandatory for any and all healthcare workers coming into patient contact. Last year the success rate of health care workers vaccination in NYC was about 37%--that is not a number to proud of.

ACSH s Dr. Josh Bloom s op-ed entitled Mandate the Flu Vaccine for Healthcare Workers, which was published this past February in *US News and World Report* can be read [here](#) [3].

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[1] http://acsh.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/894326_54591782.jpg

[2] <http://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/New-York-Hospital-Workers-Masks-Flu-Vaccine-Prevention-224117271.html>

[3] <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2013/02/04/mandate-flu-vaccines-for-healthcare-workers>