



**State of Louisiana**  
Louisiana Department of Health  
Office of Public Health

September 7, 2018

Dear Louisiana Nursing Home Director,

The Louisiana Office of Public Health is encouraging annual influenza vaccination for nursing home residents and all staff. The 2017-2018 influenza season was one of the worst seasons in the United States since public health officials began tracking more than 10 years ago. During the 2017-2018 season, flu outbreaks in Louisiana nursing homes accounted for 1,271 cases, 152 hospitalizations, and 31 deaths.

Severe and even fatal influenza illness can be introduced by newly admitted residents, health care or any general nursing home staff, and by visitors. Vaccination of all persons, including residents, all employees (not just the nursing or care staff), and accessory staff is the first step in preventing transmission of influenza viruses and other infectious agents in long-term care facilities.

Influenza prevention requires planning and infection prevention education. **Each nursing home should have influenza vaccination policies for residents and all staff members.** According to the 2013 report from the National Vaccine Advisory Committee titled Strategies to Achieve the Healthy People 2020 Annual Influenza Vaccine Coverage Goal for Health-Care Personnel, a comprehensive influenza infection prevention plan includes:

- 1) offering free influenza vaccination to all healthcare personnel (HCP) across varying work shifts, locations, and days;
- 2) providing targeted, interactive education programs annually to all HCP to explain the impact of influenza, particularly among high-risk patients, and to address misconceptions and concerns about the safety of influenza vaccination; and
- 3) educating HCP about the importance of influenza vaccination in promoting patient and employee safety.

The following Guidance for Creating an Employee Influenza Vaccination Program in Long-term Care Settings will provide guidance and information for developing a mandatory influenza vaccination program within your facility. The OPH Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section (IDEpi) is available to assist with planning and outbreak response. As a reminder, two or more suspected cases of influenza in a nursing home should be reported immediately to IDEpi's 24-hour hotline: (800) 256-2748.

Along with vaccination offered on site, influenza vaccination is also readily available from health care providers and community pharmacies. Parish Health Units offer flu vaccination for a \$10 administration fee, which can be waived if a staff member is unable to pay. This year's public health mass vaccination exercises will promote vaccination for critical infrastructure persons, which includes nursing home staff.

Please protect yourself, your family and friends, your patients and your community by getting a flu vaccine!

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Raoult Ratard, written in a cursive style.

Raoult Ratard, MD  
State Epidemiologist  
Louisiana Department of Health

A blue ink signature of Frank Welch, written in a cursive style.

Frank Welch, MD, MSPH  
Immunization Program Medical Director  
Louisiana Department of Health