

Keeping the Flu Out of the Workplace

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

Shelli Dankoff – Media Relations Program Manager

More than \$21 billion.

That's what the 2017-2018 flu season cost employers, according to an estimate from a Chicago-based executive coaching firm, with an estimated 25 million workers sickened nationwide. The total number is considered lost productivity calculated on average wages lost due to missing four, eight-hour work shifts.

More than 900,000 people were hospitalized across the United States and 80,000 died from complications during last year's flu season.

While there was a drop in the efficacy of last year's influenza vaccine, doctors say that is not an excuse to skip getting it this year. They say lost productivity – both in your work and personal life - should be plenty of reason to protect yourself against this preventable disease. And it's not just about you but also those around you.

"Even if you can reduce the chance of getting an illness by 30 to 40%, I think those are pretty good odds. As opposed to getting the flu where you are going be out of work seven to 14 days minimum, and that's a huge loss for people - both from an income standpoint and actually personal family time," says Dr. Brian Curtis with OSF HealthCare

A recent report from the Centers for Disease Control shows only 37% of adults got a flu shot last year, while another study indicated about 57% plan to get one this year.

Some employers are starting to take steps to encourage their employees to get vaccinated. More than half of all states in the U.S.—including Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri—have laws regarding flu shots for health care workers. Illinois law requires flu shots for health care workers, with limited exceptions.

"If you're an employer, having your employees get the flu vaccine actually keeps you in a healthier work environment, actually will keep them healthier, keep them at work," explains Dr. Curtis. "And actually for the people that you have in your employment that cannot get the flu vaccine, you actually protect them also."

Dr. Curtis says cases of flu are starting to pop in Illinois, but we are a long way from the peak season in January. He says now is an opportune time to get vaccinated, since it takes two to four weeks for it to take effect. Heading into the holiday season is another good reason to get vaccinated in order to lessen the chance of sharing the illness with friends and family.

Flu usually starts with a quick onset of fever and chills with a typical bout lasting one to two weeks. While severe symptoms usually subside in two to three days, weakness, fatigue, and a dry cough can linger for up to a week.

Learn more about symptoms and treatment [here](#).