



The Flu Virus: Special Considerations for Individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

Considerations for Individuals

- Individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD) are generally more susceptible to getting the flu or other viruses due to one or more of the following factors:
 - Having several different staff in and out of their homes daily
 - Living in environments with two (2) or more persons
 - May be unable to communicate flu-like symptoms
 - May have pre-existing health issues that put them at greater risk
 - May have mobility issues that compromise lung function, increasing their risks if they do come into contact with the flu virus
 - May be unable to remove themselves from others with flu-like symptoms
 - Could be unable to understand the importance of complying with hygiene measures such as washing hands to prevent the spread of flu viruses
- Schedule and obtain flu immunizations for each individual. Discuss the person's individual needs and risk factors with the medical practitioner, including possible allergy to the preservative used (thimerosal). If individual has a thimerosal allergy, make arrangements for them to receive a preservative-free vaccine.

Considerations for Providers

- Review agency contingency staffing plan to be prepared if staff are ill and unable to cover assigned shifts.
- Educate staff to stay home when they have flu-like symptoms to prevent the spread of the virus.
- Develop and post reminders/memos of flu prevention measures including universal precautions and sanitization procedures.
- Encourage individuals and staff to wash their hands frequently and thoroughly for 20 seconds.



- Staff (including day/work program staff) should have a documented flu vaccination when working with this population.
- Encourage staff and individuals to use good hygiene measures including:
 - Coughing/sneezing into tissue or arm
 - Washing hands after sneezing or coughing into tissue or blowing nose
 - Washing hands after touching eyes, mouth, or nose
 - Washing hands before eating
 - Using hand sanitizer correctly (when washing hands with soap and water is not possible)
 - Frequently cleaning hard surfaces with disinfecting solution or wipes including door handles, durable medical equipment, speech augmentative devices, medication boxes, water faucets, key boards, etc.
- Make sure necessary protective supplies are in the homes for staff and housemates to use when one or more individuals are sick with flu-like symptoms (tissue, hand sanitizer and soap, masks, gloves, surface sanitizer).
- Consider options to separate anyone with flu-like symptoms from others in the home.
- Make sure any pregnant staff and clients are aware of added risks of the flu.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). *Flu and you*. Retrieved 10/12/2015 from: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/consumer/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Influenza vaccination information for health care workers*. Retrieved 10/12/2015 from: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/healthcareworkers.htm>

Loison, E., Poirier-Beaudouin, B., Seffer, V., Paoletti, A., Abitbol, V., Tartour, E., Gougeon, M.-L. (2014). *Suppression by Thimerosal of Ex-Vivo CD4+ T Cell Response to Influenza Vaccine and Induction of Apoptosis in Primary Memory T Cells*. *PLoS ONE*, 9(4). Retrieved 09/16/2015 from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3972181/>

U. S. National Library of Medicine: MedlinePlus. *Flu*. Retrieved 10/12/2015 from: <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/flu.html>