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NEWS RELEASE



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ANA Urges Registered Nurses to Get the H1N1 Vaccine
ANA Maintains Long-Standing Policy Opposing Mandatory Seasonal Influenza Vaccine Policies for RNs, Though Considers Vaccines a Critical Public Health Measure

SILVER SPRING, MD – Recognizing that the H1N1 virus is a pandemic and a public health emergency, the American Nurses Association (ANA) is urging all registered nurses to get the H1N1 vaccine to protect themselves, their families, and the patients they serve.

Though ANA continues to oppose mandatory seasonal influenza vaccine policies, it also acknowledges that the public health threat posed by the novel H1N1 virus will spur employers to enact mandatory H1N1 vaccination policies for health care workers as a safety measure. ANA does not support such policies unless they adhere to certain guidelines to ensure they are fair, equitable, and not enforced as a condition of employment.

“ANA understands the potential need for a mandatory vaccination policy during a pandemic, but we are committed to ensuring that such policies are not discriminatory or punitive and contain appropriate exemptions,” said ANA President Rebecca M. Patton, MSN, RN, CNOR. “The bottom line is no registered nurse should be fired for not being vaccinated. That said, we should all be vaccinated, since no one has immunity to this new H1N1 strain. While some groups may be more vulnerable to severe illness and death, we are all susceptible.”

ANA believes mandatory H1N1 vaccination policies should only be implemented under these conditions:

- The mandatory policy comes from the highest level of legal authority, ideally state government
- Suitable exemptions, such as for those allergic to components of the vaccine, are included
- Discriminating against or disciplining nurses who choose not to participate is prohibited

MORE...

ANA Urges RNs to Get H1N1 Vaccine/ Page 2...

- The policy is part of a comprehensive infection control program that includes personal protective equipment, such as N95 respirators, to increase safety
- Vaccinations are free and provided at convenient times and locations to foster compliance
- The employer negotiates with worker union representatives to resolve any differences when the policy is implemented at a health care facility

ANA's protection of nurses' workplace rights should not be confused with the message ANA is delivering to nurses: Get the H1N1 vaccine. To promote vaccination, ANA is sending a letter to its members and to affiliated specialty nursing organizations encouraging immunization for H1N1 and seasonal influenza.

Noting that the seasonal influenza vaccination rate for nurses and all health care workers consistently remains below 50 percent, ANA President Patton said, "As nurses, we have an ethical obligation to protect ourselves, our patients and our families from illness. Vaccination is one simple step we can take to do that, and it's even more crucial during this H1N1 pandemic. We strongly encourage nurses to lead the way to increasing vaccination rates among health care workers."

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The ANA is the only full-service professional organization representing the interests of the nation's 2.9 million registered nurses through its constituent member nurses associations, its organizational affiliates, and its workforce advocacy affiliate, the Center for American Nurses. The ANA advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting the rights of nurses in the workplace, projecting a positive and realistic view of nursing, and by lobbying the Congress and regulatory agencies on health care issues affecting nurses and the public.